My Autobiography

Madame Judith

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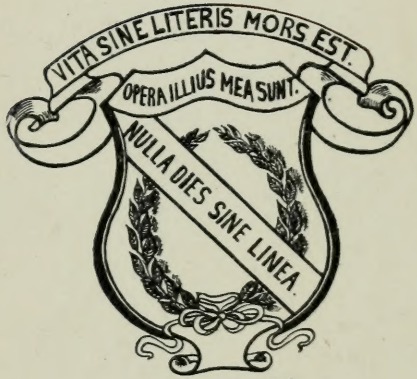

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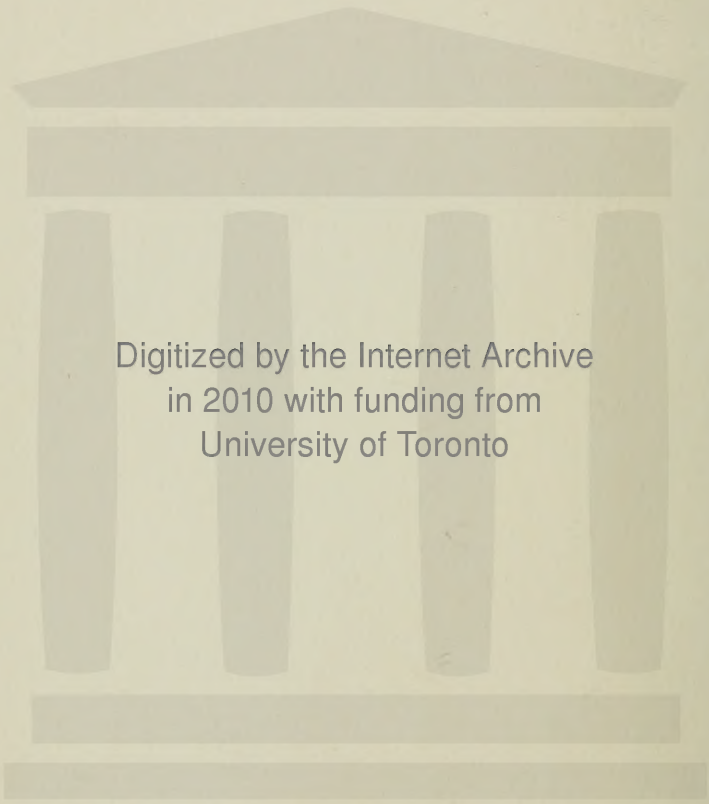
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MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Madame Judith.

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

BY

MADAME JUDITH

Edited by Paul G'Sell and translated from the French by Mrs. Arthur Bell

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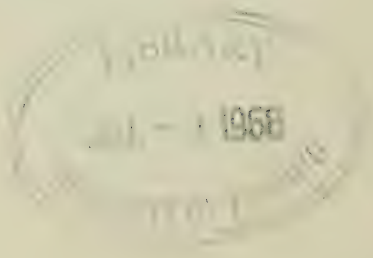

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MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER I

My mother makes the acquaintance of the parents of the great tragic actress Rachel—My *début* at the age of six—Theramenes' beard—A Jewess learns the Church Catechism.

When sitting alone in the unpretending apartment I now occupy I catch sight of the reflection of my face lined with wrinkles, and of my white hair in the looking-glass of the wardrobe in the corner, I experience a certain feeling of wonder at finding myself thus deserted. I who once had concentrated on me the attention of brilliant crowds of spectators; I who have been applauded by reigning sovereigns and by the aristocracy that formed their court; I whose youth and grace once won so much homage; I who owned a mansion and carriages and welcomed at my table many of my most gifted contemporaries, and was in close touch with all who were most distinguished in literature, in art and in public life! At such times it seems to me that the

little bent old woman I see in the mirror is but an imaginary vision, and that the brilliant, intoxicating past is the only reality. The true Judith is the Judith of days gone by, and I live now only in the memory of what I was then.

In spite of my advanced age I retain memories so precise and so vivid that they are almost enough to divert my mind from my melancholy isolation. And the interest I take in them makes me presume—perhaps erroneously—that there may be many others to whom they will appeal. I should be sorry if my strangely romantic career were to be consigned to oblivion as soon as I have closed my eyes. That is why I have decided to publish this autobiography.

My earliest recollections relate to the intimacy of my mother with the family of the great tragic actress Rachel about 1834 or 1835.

Truth to tell, there was nothing about Rachel to presage the glory that incomparable actress was to win. She lived unknown with her parents Père et Mère Félix, as they were called, who had already three other daughters and a son, and were to have another girl the following year.

The Félixes were very poor and had hard work to feed so many hungry little mouths. The father, a German Jew, had led a wandering

existence incompatible with any regular employment, and really did nothing to help support his family. He might, it is true, easily have aided his wife in carrying on her little business of selling articles for the toilette, such as handkerchiefs, neckties, etc., but he preferred spending the money she earned in drinking and smoking in public-houses. His philosophy was as happy as it was immoral. He always lived at some one else's expense ; and when his wife chose to take a little rest it was on his daughter Rachel that he sponged.

My mother, who was a lace merchant, became acquainted with the Félixes on one of her trading expeditions. She had stopped one evening in the market-place of a Swiss village to listen to two little girls singing. They had placed two lighted lanterns at their feet, and seemed to be trying with their shrill young voices rather to arouse the compassion of the passers-by than to charm them. At the end of each song they went round to collect the coppers of the audience in oyster-shells, and to try to sell the words and music of what they had just been singing. The younger of the two was so charming in spite of her emaciation, and the expression of her face, especially of her great black eyes, was so pathetic and so full of passion, that it was impossible to help watching her.

She was the one who was later to take the stage name of Rachel, and who was then called Elisa.

My mother went up to Madame Félix, who was standing behind her girls, and entered into conversation with her. Both of the same religion, and carrying on a similar trade, they soon became friends, and when they got back to Paris the sympathy between them greatly increased.

It was the choice of the theatre as a profession by the Félix children which decided my fate.

My mother, who was very staid and methodical, would have liked me to go into trade, and her cherished dream was to see me some day enter a good shop as a saleswoman or cashier. Her ambition was, however, powerless to compete with the dramatic fiend who appeared to me for the first time in the person of Sophie, the eldest of the Félix sisters, whose father made her take the name of Sarah for her theatrical career.

She was playing then in a little theatre known as the Panthéon in the Latin quarter. In one of the pieces that were being given there, *Pierre Durand*, there was a part for a child, and Sophie-Sarah thought it would suit me to perfection. She came to my mother and asked her to lend me to the Panthéon company. Her request was granted, and you can just imagine how happy

I was. I was only six years old, but the theatre had already turned my head.

After eight rehearsals I knew my part thoroughly and I acted it with such spirit that the students, who generally made up the audience at the Panthéon, applauded me furiously. They even went so far as to dub me the little Mars[1] of the Latin quarter. This was my first triumph, and that at six years old! Hadn't I a right to be proud? There are not many actresses who win laurels at such an early age as that.

I remained nearly a year at the Panthéon, but my stay there was cut short by my school studies, and my mother would stand no nonsense where they were concerned. She was determined to give me a good education. So I was sent back to the establishment of the worthy Madame Dufort in the Rue du Petit-Muse. Honesty forbids me to say that I was very attentive to my lessons, for the green room, the stage, the footlights, and the applause haunted me perpetually. Directly recreation time began I portioned out *rôles* to my schoolfellows.

"You, Louisa," I would say, "are to be the old Bohemian who stole the little girl from her parents; you, Margaret, can be the little girl, and I'll be the gendarme," and so on.

[1] See p. 74.

I would thus quickly get up capital scenes, and I was always broken-hearted when the bell rang calling us back to the schoolroom.

My mother realized that it would not do to oppose such a very strong bent, and so she consented to allow me to follow the dramatic course of instruction conducted by Saint-Aulaire, of the Comédie Française, at the Molière Theatre.

Rachel was studying there then, and it was in response to her entreaties that I was allowed to join her.

Saint-Aulaire used to give us lessons during the day and make us perform of an evening in public. He was a fairly good teacher, but he did not leave much of a reputation at the Comédie Française. He was an intelligent actor, but the minor parts he played in tragic pieces really never gave him a chance to become celebrated.

I remember an amusing story about him. He and the actor Desmousseaux were playing minor parts at the Comédie Française, and as they took the same *rôles* they used sometimes to wear portions of each other's costumes.

One day when Saint-Aulaire was to appear as Theramenes in *Phædra*, he found he had forgotten to bring the long grey beard indispensable to his make-up as the wise tutor of the

young Hippolytus, so he ran to fetch that of Desmousseaux, whose dressing-room was nearer than his own.

Unfortunately Desmousseaux was in the habit of taking snuff, and his beard was very full of it, so full indeed that when the luckless Saint-Aulaire essayed to reply to Hippolytus, he began to sneeze violently enough to crack his skull.

"Avouez-le," he began. "At chum !—tout change—At chum !—et depuis quelque jours—At chum !—At chum !—At chum !—orgueilleux et sauvage—At chum! At chum ! At chum!"

The audience laughed fit to split their sides, although the character of Theramenes in Racine's play is certainly not a comic one, and he had never before been found so amusing.

I remember that among the pupils at the Molière there was a young Jew named Michel Lévy. He wished to be an actor, and he did afterwards become celebrated, but as a publisher, not on the stage. At the time I refer to he and his brother Calmann used to sell books, chiefly old ones, that were exposed for sale on some planks fastened against the wall in the open air near the Rue St.-Martin. When it was cold they would blow on their fingers to warm them as they waited about for customers, and pull down their shabby old fur caps over their red ears. A humble beginning truly of

one of the biggest and most honestly earned fortunes ever made in the publishing world.

Rachel used to act when she was with Saint-Aulaire in all manner of *rôles*, now as a soubrette, now as an artless maiden, an accomplished coquette, or the heroine of a tragedy. I have seen her play Marinette in the *Dépit Amoureux* with truly diabolical spirit.

> "Ardez le beau museau,
> Pour nous donner envie encore de sa peau!"

And how well she would deliver the questions:

> "Moi, j'aurais de l'amour pour ta chienne de face?
> Moi, je te chercherais?"

And at the words:

> "Ma foi, l'on t'en fricasse
> Des filles comme nous?"

she would actually make a long nose and twirl round on her toes in a perfectly unconstrained manner.

This is not the idea one has now of the actress who interpreted *Phædra* in such a majestically tragic way, the mere sight of whom used to fill the spectators with reverent enthusiasm, and who personified the heroines of antiquity like a statue from the hand of Pheidias.

At the time I am speaking of she had not yet decided on her true vocation. She was hesitating between comedy and tragedy. All

great artists have had these times of uncertainty. But can it be asserted that the study of comic parts is of no use to those who are destined to the service of Melpomene? For laughter and tears are not so widely separated as is generally supposed. Every situation in life can be looked at from a melancholy or a happy point of view. And an intelligence trained to study human nature from the humorous point of view is useful to a tragic actress, because it tends to give her a high standard of realism, and to save her from mere lifeless declamation.

I remember well the sarcastic laugh with which Rachel, when at the very zenith of her fame, preluded the following lines from the part of Hermione—

> "Pleurante après son char, vous voulez qu'on me voie!
> Mais, Seigneur, en un jour, ce serait trop de joie."

She certainly could never have so truly caught the spirit of the words had she never tried her hand at comedy.

A very serious weakness in my eyes interrupted my artistic education. I was threatened with complete loss of sight, and for nearly three years I was quite blind, but then, thank God, I was cured. On my recovery my mother took me back to the school in the Rue du Petit-Musc. In spite of my divided attention I was a pretty good pupil, because I had such an

excellent memory, an advantage I myself recognized and knew how to turn to account.

My mother had not told the head of the school, Mme. Dufort, that I was a Jewess. Perhaps she wanted to save me from the little annoyances children of our race often have to put up with amongst those who are being brought up as Christians. I was now eleven years old, the age at which my schoolfellows prepared for their first communion. I knew that the curé of the parish of St. Paul, in which our school was, had got a beautiful prize-book with gilt edges for the girl who answered his questions on the catechism best. Relying upon my extraordinary memory to carry off this reward, I did not hesitate to have my name put down amongst those of the curé's lambs. No one knew the lists of the capital sins and cardinal virtues better than I did; no one was better up than I in the wiles of Satan and the dangers of temptation. A dear little friend of mine, Henriette by name, tried her very utmost to oust me from the first place, but it was all in vain.

At the end of the year, just before those under preparation for first communion were to go into retreat, the curé called us all together into the sacristy to award the prize to the girl who knew the catechism best. He called me to come forward—

"Julie Bernat!"

In his hands he held a crown of gilt paper. I already stood before him that he might place it on my head, when a little twinge of conscience made itself felt, and I said—

"Excuse me, Monsieur le Curé, but does it matter that I am a Jewess?"

"What?—what?—what?" stammered the poor priest. "You are a Jewess?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé, I am."

"Oh, what a pity!—what a pity!" he cried, staring at me as if he expected to find some diabolical brand upon my face. "A Jewess!—a Jewess!" he went on. "I do wish I had been told of this before. . . . Of course, my child, you cannot receive your first communion; you cannot have the catechism prize."

And so I had the mortification of seeing Henriette receive the golden crown and the book with gilt edges.

CHAPTER II

The Félix company—Rachel scrapes carrots—The Bath of the juvenile company—Father Félix's ways—Mademoiselle Mars' age—*Phædra* the first and *Phædra* the second—Rachel's style of dressing and acting—A little lesson in spelling—Rachel delights in listening to herself.

About this time the Castelli company, all children, were winning a great success in the Salle Ventadour. The little actors and actresses played similar parts to their grown-up rivals, and their pretty ways of mimicking the latter, their naïve gestures, solemn declamation of serious passages, and amusing attempts at expressing passion, greatly delighted the spectators.

Father Félix, who had such a large family, was fired by a spirit of emulation, and determined to turn his children into a company of which he would himself be the manager. To complete his staff he came to my mother and asked her to trust me to him. She consented; and he also at the same time engaged a boy called Edward.

In return for our dramatic talents he gave us board and lodging. But what board and what lodging!

Rachel as a Drudge

We were all herded together in little attics in a house in the Rue Beauregard, five or six of us in each room and two or three slept in the same bed. Carrots and potatoes were our only food. Rachel used to help me to peel and wash them. She was always in very good spirits even when working like a drudge. She was so haunted by the tragic muse that she could not help declaiming at all sorts of times. I remember her once grasping a carrot and addressing it as if it were Pyrrhus with the words—

> "Ton cœur impatient de revoir ta Troyenne
> Ne souffre qu'à regret qu'une autre t'entretienne
> Tu lui parles du cœur, tu la cherches des yeux.'

Then furiously brandishing the innocent vegetable she went on—

> "Porte aux pieds des autels ce cœur qui m'abandonne
> Va, cours; mais crains encor d'y trouver Hermione."

And with assumed rage she chopped the carrots into pieces crying, "To the devil with Pyrrhus!"

I remember, too, that there was only one tub for the whole Félix troupe to wash in, and as the same water had to do for six girls and two boys, it had to be very hot to begin with if it were not to be too cold at the end of the ablutions.

The other children gave me the privilege of using the water when it was clean, and I used

to get into the tub with Rachel, who already enjoyed certain advantages not shared by her sisters. We had, however, to pay for this distinction by being nearly scalded with the boiling water, from which we issued redder than lobsters. In fact we really rather envied those who came afterwards, for whom, though the water was not so clear, it was a good deal cooler.

Father Félix himself superintended our rehearsals. He had a strong German accent, which gave a certain originality to his lessons in elocution, but for all that he was a clever teacher, and on the whole the advice he gave us was not at all bad.

As most of the pieces in our repertory were pathetic, he insisted on our throwing a great deal of tragic expression into our acting.

"Come, Chudith!" he would say to me. "You don't put half enough feeling into that speech. Now listen how *I* recite it." And he would repeat it to me with a touching tremolo in his German voice which I would try to copy, but failing to please him he would get angry.

"I cannot put any more feeling into it," I would plead; and he would retort, "You can't, can't you! We'll see." Then he would go and take down a cat-o'-nine-tails that hung on the wall, and give me some cruel cuts across the legs.

I would begin to cry, and he would say: "Now then, recite that again." I would obey as best I could for my sobs, and he would exult over me, exclaiming: "Come, that's better, you see you *can* put more feeling into it!"

Our rehearsals were held in the Ranelagh Theatre. They have not made any very great impression on my memory, for I did everything then in a mechanical kind of way and with a very bad grace, not caring much for a profession I was being taught in such a rough, uncompromising manner.

All I recollect is that the boy Edward, who was always hungry, for the food the Félix family had to put up with was not enough for him, was always eating apples on the stage which he had filched from fruit stalls. I can still see him in the love scenes he acted with me coming to give me a kiss with his mouth full of apple.

"My angel!" he would exclaim, to which I replied in a whisper, "Finish your apple first, please!"

On Sundays we used all to go for a walk in the Bois de Boulogne. But it was not always much of a treat. Dinah Félix, who later made a capital soubrette, and won great applause, especially for her graceful and roguish interpretation of Lisette in the *Jeux de l'Amour et*

du Hasard, suffered from rickets in her childhood and could not stand long at a time, so she was always wheeled along in a little carriage. During our walks her father confided her to the care of one or another of us who took it in turns to push the invalid. The way from the Rue de Beauregard to the Bois de Boulogne always seemed interminable, and we were quite tired out when we arrived.

Do you suppose that Father Félix got us any refreshment or gave us some money to get a drink of milk? Not a bit of it! The stingy fellow never thought of such a thing, but just stretched his lazy limbs out beside his wife beneath some shady tree, and cried out roughly to us: "Go and play, it's good for children to romp about."

You can just imagine how much heart we had for romping after our long tramp, and with the walk back in prospect.

Rachel, who had made a fleeting appearance at the Gymnase, made her real *début* at the Français in June 1838, and at once became the idol of the public. In August, of the same year, Jules Janin referred to her in the *Débats* as the queen of all actresses of the present, the past, or the future, and Father Félix, recognizing the profit that he might gain through the genius of his daughter, at once gave up the

performances of his company, which did not bring him in enough.

To give an idea of the rapidity with which Rachel conquered fame, I will just relate the following anecdote—

One evening, when the celebrated Mademoiselle Mars, who was a member of the Français company, was not going to act, she was passing the theatre in a carriage and noticed crowds gathering about the entrance and eagerly looking at the announcements on the placard in which Rachel's name figured. Régnier was with her, and she said to him: "What is all the excitement about? *I* am not to appear to-night."

"It is Rachel who is the attraction," was Regnier's reply.

"What! the little *débutante?*"

"Yes, just her, and no one else."

"What! that girl is a reigning favourite already?"

Now, Mademoiselle Mars, who had long been a capital actress, but was beginning to realize that she was getting old, could not help feeling put out at seeing the rising of another star in the dramatic firmament.

She attributed Rachel's easy and rapid victory to her youth, which always makes a strong appeal to the public, and from that

moment she would never admit her own age.

Some burglars having stolen some valuable property from her hotel in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne she had to give evidence at the trial.

"Your name?" enquired the President.

"Hippolyte Mars."

"Your age?"

To which she muttered something that sounded like "*ente ans.*"

"I beg your pardon, I did not hear what you said."

"You heard well enough," was the retort, and no more could be got of her.

Rachel's sudden triumph led to my being sent back to my mother, but I still often went to see the great tragic actress for whom I was full of enthusiasm. I simply worshipped her. Many are my memories of her, and I will recall them all now so as not to break the thread of my narrative, although they will carry me far away from the date at which I shall resume the story of my own life.

Rachel always remained very simple-minded in spite of the splendour of her reputation, and to me this seemed the most striking trait of her character, especially when I compare it with that of other celebrated actresses, notably one

of those who later illustrated Phædra. I say illustrated, instead of interpreted, advisedly, the second Phædra having been very inferior to the first. I appeal to all who were able to see both in that *rôle*. One was a statue, the other but a statuette. I heard a story of the latter which is very significant of theatrical ways nowadays.

When she was on a professional visit to England, she was not content with the good round sum she received for her performances at the theatre. She hired a little suite of rooms in Piccadilly, in which she used to remain all day, and she had it given out in the papers that any one might come and look at her in her ordinary everyday costume for a substantial fee.

This the first Phædra would certainly never have done.

Another great difference between Rachel and many other actors and actresses who have since become celebrated, was that she never resorted to any stage tricks or artifices to win the admiration of the public.

At the present time, pretty well every actor and actress affects some peculiarity of delivery to attract attention. One will shout or give utterance to weird, hiccuppy sounds, with a view to seeming terrible, another will croak or strain the voice in a painful manner, others will chant and drag their sentences so as the better

to show off their wonderful elocution and one, an actor who has recently retired, used to speak through his nose, making a noise like that of a trumpet ; all peculiarities which cannot be said to have anything to do with art, but for all that were always successful in arousing the astonishment of silly spectators.

Rachel on the other hand was supremely natural. She was dignified without being stiff ; majestic without being pompous. She spoke earnestly and passionately, but she never declaimed. Her features expressed tragedy without effort, and when in repose were dreamy and melancholy, becoming terrible when she was agitated by grief, anger or jealous rage. Her voice, which was clear and powerful, never assumed any peculiar intonation, but changed constantly according to the feelings interpreted, becoming now caressing, now languorous, vibrating, passionate, imperious, harsh or sibilant, according to circumstances.

She had not the detestable habit indulged in by nearly all actors, of becoming, so to speak, petrified in certain attitudes, of suddenly arresting some gesture, taking a step and pausing, taking another and stopping again. She walked and behaved not like an actress, but just exactly as would a princess or a heroine of antiquity.

I have often been present at her toilette in

her dressing-room at the theatre, and I can tell you it was got through quickly enough. Although she was thin she was so well proportioned that the antique costume seemed to have been invented for her. She never took the trouble to put a stitch or a pin anywhere, so as to make the folds fall in a picturesque way. She just put her peplum on as it was, and it draped itself naturally, lending itself effectively to her movements, the pleats seeming to arrange themselves about her limbs as though they felt that she lent her beauty to them.

She was indeed almost irreproachable in every way, and the very few errors of taste of which she was ever guilty only increased the admiration felt for a genius that so rarely erred.

Once when playing Esther she attempted to bring out the contrast between the two hemistichs of the line—

"L'Éternel est son nom, le monde est son ouvrage."

She pronounced the first part of the alexandrine with great solemnity, but the second with an almost naïve simplicity as if to imply that all is easy to God, but such an intonation might also mean that the work of God is nothing much after all.

"That's all he did!" cried some wag in the orchestra, and the audience roared with laughter.

The following verses were, however, so splendidly delivered that in a moment the great tragedienne had re-conquered the spectators and was again and again frantically applauded during the rest of the act.

The extraordinary part of Rachel's success was that her acting was chiefly intuitive, for her dramatic education had been very rudimentary. There has been a good deal of talk about the faults of spelling with which her letters were embellished. I must explain that she was rather disposed to be jealous, and when that was the case to falter a little in her affection for me. One day, for instance, wishing to injure me in the esteem of the Comte de Galve, who was a friend of mine, she wrote to him declaring that I was unworthy of his respect. He owed himself to her alone, she said, and to work upon his feelings she reminded him that his mother had been very fond of her.

"*Elle m'a onorée de ses bontés*" she wrote. I spell the words just as she did, and the Comte de Galve having nothing better to do at the moment brought the letter to me. We laughed heartily over it, and I at once took a pen and wrote as follows—

"My Dear Rachel,

"I confess that I have never been *onorée*

with the friendship of M. de Galve, but I have been and still am honored (*honorée*) by it, and I am very sure that with or without an *h* you will never succeed in lessening the affection the count and I have for each other.

"JUDITH."

Rachel took the hint and never again attempted to come between me and those who were attached to me. Her passion for her art made up for the deficiencies of her education. She was one of the first to recognize her own genius, and was in love with her own voice, her grace and her enthusiasm.

One day she was acting in *Bajazet* with La Favart, who was a very second-rate actress. In the third act La Favart who was playing the *rôle* of Athalie appeared in four scenes before Rachel came on as Roxana. During these four scenes Rachel was behind the scenes listening to what was going on on the stage, and betraying signs of great impatience. At last when her own turn came she surpassed herself, winning one of her very greatest triumphs.

When the curtain fell I happened to be near her, and she said to me: "I had to act my very best, for I was determined to humble La Favart, and I have done it. Mon Dieu, I had to make up to my ears for what they had been enduring. It did me good to listen to myself!"

CHAPTER III

Rachel's family feeling—Rachel and her sister Sarah rivals in love—A shepherdess who devoured her sheep—Persecution of a cat—Rachel jealous of the applause of her fellow actresses—A doctor held up to scorn.

I HAVE already said that Rachel was jealous. She certainly was not as great as a woman as she was as an artist. I have just described how the acting of La Favart irritated her. But she was even less able to put up with good actresses than with inferior ones. The first time I suggested that I should join the Français company she tried to dissuade me and I did not, therefore, do so until several years later, when fresh proposals were made to me.

Her reason for getting her sisters and her brother engaged at La Comédie Française was not because they were her relations, but just to secure surroundings in which she would shine by contrast ; for I am very certain that her own taste was too good for her not to be aware that they really had no talent at all.

Sophie Félix, who took the name of Sarah, the eldest of the sisters, was such a bad actress

that even Rachel's influence could not save her from dismissal. After she had been hissed as Célimène in the *Misanthrope* she took refuge at the Odéon. Later she tried to get back to the Molière Theatre, but recognizing at last her own want of dramatic power, she became a seller of perfumes, and actually invented the famous tincture still in use, known as the *Eau des Fées*. There is really no knowing what dramatic art may lead to when it results, as in this case, in the vending of adjuncts to the toilette.

Rebecca Félix was no more of an artist than her sister, but the poor girl was not long a member of the Comédie Française company, for she died of consumption at the age of twenty-three.

The greatest scandal of all was the admission into the Française company of Rachel's brother, Raphael Félix. He was a well-built fellow, but such a perfect nonentity that his good looks availed him nothing when he attempted to represent Hippolytus, Bajazet or Orestes. He too, however, like Sarah, soon realized that some other profession would suit him better. He became a manager instead of an actor, and served as his sister's Barnum in her last tour in America.

Rachel's other two sisters, Adelaide known as Lia, and Mélanie who took the name of Dinah, did not owe their success to her. Lia did not

act at the Comédie Française, but made a fair dramatic reputation elsewhere, winning a good deal of applause. As for Dinah, who, you will remember, I told you was delicate as a child, and whom Père Félix used to make us push in her carriage to the Bois de Boulogne, she grew up a very charming girl and played the part of soubrette at the Français with considerable skill; but she was not engaged there till 1862, that is to say, four years after the death of Rachel.

The trio under Rachel's special protection were, however, quite enough to try the patience of the long-suffering public. But protests in the Press, and complaints from the audience, only aroused the mirth of the great tragedienne. "Let them clamour as much as they will," she said to herself. "If they want to see me they must support my family," and, as a matter of fact, they did put up with every whim of hers for a long time.

In spite of what she did for her sisters and brother her affection for them was very intermittent, and she did not put herself about much to secure their maintenance. I remember a rather exciting scene between her and her sister Sarah, of which I was a witness. The latter rushed one evening into Rachel's dressing-room in the Théâtre Français. The famous

actress was just making herself up to appear as Phædra. She was accentuating the shadows beneath her eyes to convey the impression of the exhaustion consequent on an ardent but unsatisfied longing.

When Sarah broke in on her it was with the words, "Rachel, you are a nuisance, a regular brute!"

"Well, Sarah, what's the matter," was Rachel's calm and dignified reply, as she went on dabbing her eyelids.

"The matter!" cried Sarah, "why, you have taken away my lover."

"Which?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" shrieked Sarah, looking as if she would like to scratch her sister's face, though she was restrained by the Olympian composure of the queen of tragedy.

"Which?" repeated Rachel, in a provoking manner.

"You wretch!"

"No more insults, if you please, or I will ring and have you turned out of the room."

"You would, would you, you hussy!"

At that, Rachel ran to the bell-rope; but Sarah, quicker than she was, caught her hand, and dropping her angry tone for a supplicating one, began to cry, stammering between her sobs—

"Oh, Rachel, I saw you with Fitz-James the banker. He was to have come to see me to-day and I waited for him in vain. I know that you have enticed him away from me. Have you not conquests enough of your own without interfering with mine?"

To this Rachel replied in a manner so crushing that poor Sarah left the field quite vanquished, white with rage, it is true, but unable to contend further with her younger but infinitely superior sister.

Another day when I had arrived rather early at a fancy dress party given by Rachel in her delightful house in the Rue Boudreau we were watching the guests arriving and congratulating those whose costumes seemed to us most successful. There were already a good many people assembled, and we formed a kind of areopagus with the distinguished literary people, artists and politicians, who, as usual, had gathered together in response to the invitation of the tragic muse, and now with us greeted the new-comers.

Presently Sarah Félix appeared, dressed as a shepherdess. She was, I must explain, very plump and well-developed, and the effect of her costume was anything but happy.

"Why, what a get-up, Sarah!" exclaimed Rachel, when she recognized her sister, and the poor girl, finding all eyes turned upon her,

blushed furiously, and stammered out "I am a shepherdess!"

But Rachel was untouched and went on, "a shepherdess who has gobbled up all her flock," at which every one roared with laughter.

Sarah was so overwhelmed with confusion that she was almost in tears, and I, feeling very indignant, went up to her, took her hand, and drew her away into a quiet corner to help her recover from Rachel's really cruel attack upon her. This will show you that the famous actress was by no means a model sister.

She was really very hard-hearted, and I got into disgrace with her one day for interfering on behalf of an unfortunate kitten that had trespassed on the lawn in the garden of her villa at Montmorency, where she was stopping with her brother Raphael. When I joined them the latter was flinging the poor little thing over the high fence, Rachel looking on approvingly. The next minute the cat, frightened by a passing carriage, got into the garden again and Raphael pounced upon it, Rachel telling him to fling it away, which he did at once, much to her delight. I was so indignant that I spoke out plainly, making them both so angry that instead of spending the day with them I went back to Paris without even taking off my hat.

There is another anecdote illustrative of

Rachel's jealousy and revengefulness. In a professional tour she was making in Germany, she was employing a little actress named Bertin who, though shorter than she was, happened to be rather like her, with a thin figure and a sallow complexion. At Stuttgart the company played a piece in which Bertin appeared before the famous actress.

The German audience, who only knew what Rachel was like from bad portraits of her, took Bertin for her and gave the former a perfect ovation, shouting, "Bravo, Rachel for ever," etc., and flinging a perfect avalanche of flowers upon the stage. Bertin was of course very much put about, and did not know how to stop the acclamations, whilst the other actors behind the scenes were trying to stifle their laughter. As for Rachel, however, she saw nothing to laugh at in the mistake and was perfectly furious. She had to go on almost directly, and when she appeared there was no applause at all, for she was supposed to be taking only a minor part. Bertin was very uncomfortable, as well she might be, for no sooner did the curtain fall than Rachel attacked her with a torrent of abuse.

"You stupid little fool!" she cried, "couldn't you make the people understand who you were?"

"How could I? Did you want me to call out, 'Hiss me, I am not Rachel'?"

"Why shouldn't you? . . . You won't act any more in my company. I'll pay you all right, but you shan't appear again." And Bertin got no more *rôles* to play in that trip.

Another characteristic of Rachel was a certain sharpness of practice where money was concerned, which almost amounted to meanness. There was once upon a time a doctor named Follot, who was so proud of being called in by the great actress that he never sent in any account. But one day he ventured to ask her if she would let his friends hear her perform something at a big party he was giving. Rachel promised that she would.

"I really owe you that much," she said. "I shall be only too glad to add to the *éclat* of your fête. You can rely on me."

The doctor was in the seventh heaven of delight. He was consumed with impatience for the great day, and issued ever so many more invitations.

"And then, you know," he kept saying to his friends, "we shall have Rachel."

The evening came, the guests arrived, but there was no Rachel. Ten o'clock struck . . . eleven o'clock. The luckless host pulled a very long face.

"She promised she would come," he kept saying, "she will be here directly, I am sure."

His disappointed guests became impatient, and much to poor Follot's disgust they set to work to tear Rachel's reputation to pieces, one calling her morality in question, another saying that she had not really so much talent as she was credited with, yet another that she exploited her admirers, and so on. The doctor scarcely had the heart to defend her. He kept on apologizing, and when at last the party broke up, every one really felt very sorry for him.

The next morning Follot went to see Rachel. When he was ushered into her room, he of course expected she would have some excuse to give him, but she said nothing, so he ventured in a hesitating gentle manner to reproach her for having failed him and broken her word.

She simply flew at him. "What," she cried, "you dare to complain of me! This is really too much. I am the one who has good cause to be angry!"

The poor doctor pinched his own arm to make sure he was not dreaming, and stuttered: "I—I——" But Rachel cut him short with the words: "You are perfectly inexcusable, and I am indeed unlucky to have such a doctor as you are. What! you actually accuse me of not coming to your party when I was ill, and you

ought to have been here to prescribe for me. I waited ever so long for you in great suffering, and I felt quite enraged against you; I still am for that matter, and have a great mind never to call you in again."

The man of drugs was struck dumb. Rachel acted the offended sovereign so well that he had not a word to say in his own defence. He muttered a few words of excuse, and withdrew. It did not mollify him much to hear afterwards that Rachel had spent the evening at the house of a friend.

Such peculiarities as these did not of course endear the famous tragedienne to her fellow-actors, who, as a rule, detested her, and did all they could to annoy her. Jealousy of course had a good deal to do with the spite sometimes shown to the famous actress. The name of Rachel outshone every other, and the newspapers were all full of it. One would have supposed that she was the only good actress at the Français, but for all that, when she was a member of it, the Comédie Française had a more brilliantly gifted company than at any other time. The public, however, only cared for Rachel, and flocked to the theatre whenever it was announced that she was to appear. The words: "*To-morrow Rachel will play in . . .*" were quite enough to make every one say: "We'll go to

the Français to-morrow then, not to-night." The receipts which, when her name was absent from the programme, only amounted to from three to four hundred francs, used to go up suddenly to four or five thousand whenever her name figured on the programme.

Many, truth to tell, were the mortifications —with which, however, she had personally nothing to do—which her popularity entailed on the rest of us. One day, for instance, my upholsterer, a well-to-do shopkeeper, of the Rue de Rivoli, asked me for some places, and I gave him some for that same evening. At about six o'clock, to my surprise, the man suddenly appeared at my house, and with some little hesitation said to me—

"I beg your pardon, madame, but Rachel is not playing to-night."

"No," was my reply, "I am playing myself."

"But—but——" stammered my visitor, "I wanted seats when Rachel was to appear."

You can easily imagine how I appreciated this kind of compliment.

All I said was: "Give me back the tickets you don't want," and I don't think I need add that I did not replace them with others, for I really was too much put out.

Similar incidents constantly occurred, not only in my case, when they may have been the

result of my own comparatively modest talent, but also to all my fellow actors at the Comédie Française.

It cannot be denied that Rachel's popularity made her rather avaricious, and her greediness for money was not the least of her weaknesses, but it is only fair to add that her father managed her business affairs, and that his cupidity was simply insatiable. Still there is no denying that she inherited his Jewish blood, and knew well how to drive on occasion a good bargain with theatrical managers.

One day, when I was myself discussing terms with an impresario, who wished to secure my services, but thought I asked too much, he said to me: "Ah, you are like Rachel, it is easy to see that you are both Jewesses."

"I beg your pardon," was my retort. "There is a great difference between us. Rachel is a Jew, and I am only a Jewess."

CHAPTER IV

I have to break with Father Félix—The adventures of an ivory statuette—Adrien Lecouvreur—La belle Arsène—Death of Rachel—The lover of two sisters—Rose Chéri makes her *début* at a salary of 100 francs a year—The story of a dress with three flounces.

THERE came a time when I left off visiting Rachel and her family. The Félixes looked upon me as a heartless young person who had forgotten those who had been good to her as a child. The crafty old Father Félix himself knew well enough why I avoided them all, for the fact was he used to make love to me on the sly, and I think Rachel suspected this, for she still came to see me and evidently retained her affection for me. I remember one day when I was absent from the Comédie Française on account of a feverish attack from which I was already recovering, that she looked in on me to see how I was getting on. We had a regular gossip together, and presently, pointing to a statuette of herself on a little table in my room, she suddenly said—

"So you have got that, have you?"

It was a charming little ivory figure carved by

the famous sculptor Barre, a true work of art, of exceptional value on account of the delicacy of its execution and the fame of the person represented. Its history was rather a curious one. It was originally commissioned from the sculptor by a certain Adrien de la Hante, one of Rachel's many admirers, who, for reasons that need not be explained, went by the nickname of Adrien Lecouvreur, and was given by him to the actress. When, however, she broke off her relations with the donor, or he with her—it is impossible to say which, for they were both fickle—she had not hesitated to sell the statuette to Prince Napoleon, and he it was who had given it to me.

I was so delighted to be on friendly terms with Rachel again that, taking the little gem of art in my hands, I said to her—

"It's very evident you would like to have this treasure back, so dear old friend, I will give it to you. You never ought to have parted with it, but take great care of it now as a beautiful representation of yourself and in remembrance of me."

She thanked me with effusion, kissed me again and again, and declared she loved me better than any of her girl friends. After this my name was for ever on her lips, and she kept consulting her other intimates as to what they thought I should like. She used to show bracelets, necklaces and

ear-rings to the other members of the company behind the scenes and say, "Do you think this or that would be a nice present for dear little Judith?" Then, her avarice getting the better of her generosity, she would keep her treasures herself after all.

Presently the time came for Rachel to start on a tour in America, and the idea occurred to her that before she left she would give me a benefit at the theatre, so she went to interview the manager, Arsène Houssaye, in his private room, accosting him with the words—

"Good morning, la belle Arsène,"—that was her nickname for him—"I want to give my little friend Judith the receipts for one of my appearances."

"But these receipts belong to the theatre," was the manager's reply.

"Don't get excited," said Rachel, "but be quiet and listen to me. I am engaged to play at the Comédie Française till the first of May, am I not? Well, I'll play one day more. Without me of course you won't take anything like as much. Well, you'll deduct from whatever you receive the amount you would have got if I had not been there, and you will give the rest to Judith. That's settled, isn't it?"

"All right!" answered the manager; and so it came about that it was in my honour that

Rachel is Taken Ill

Rachel made her last appearance at the Française, for it was to be her last.

The next day she came to say good-bye to me. She was in very low spirits, and could not keep the tears back.

"Something tells me," she said, "that I am leaving France never to return."

A melancholy presentiment as it turned out, for it was, alas! partially fulfilled. It was during this tour that the terrible malady began to which the unfortunate actress was to succumb so rapidly.

At Philadelphia, after she had just been hurling forth the imprecations of Camille in *Les Horaces*, she complained behind the scenes of being fearfully cold. As a general rule, playing that *rôle* used to throw her into a perspiration, and she had to be sponged all over when she got back to her dressing-room, but this time there was not a drop of sweat and, although her attendants wrapped her in quantities of flannels, nothing could warm her. From that time she was never free from a bad cough, and was brought back to France in a precarious condition. The doctors advised her to try the climate of Egypt, and she went there.

On her way there a young officer on board her ship fell in love with her in spite of her delicate state of health, perhaps, indeed, because of his compassion for one so young and gifted,

threatened with death. He asked her to marry him and she consented, for she had begun to care for him, but the Félix family were on the watch and, fearing that a husband taken *in extremis* would carry off the whole fortune of his dying wife, they made the poor girl re-embark for France as soon as she landed, and she reached Cannes only to die there.

She was only thirty-eight. Throughout my whole life her illustrious memory has ever been with me, and it has always been a great source of pride to me that her affection for me led her to pay me the great compliment of giving a representation—as it turned out, her last—for me at the Comédie Française, where she had achieved her greatest triumphs.

I alluded above to M. de la Hante. I will now add something about his later life which occurs to me. After having been Rachel's lover he became that of her sister Dinah. This was how it came about. Dinah was affianced to the novelist Capendu, but a condition of the proposed marriage was that the latter should break off an old *liaison*. He promised he would, but kept putting off doing so, and the union with Dinah was consequently delayed and in the end the engagement was broken off. Rachel, who was still alive at the time, had generously provided Dinah with a fine trousseau in view of her

setting up housekeeping with Capendu, and when that young lady found herself stranded she wisely looked about her for consolation and fixed upon M. de la Hante. He being not unwilling, she entered into a left handed alliance with him, and the trousseau Rachel had paid for aided her successor in the affections of her old lover to win him finally away from her.

I must now return to the time, many years earlier, at which I broke off my account of my own life. Soon after the breaking up of the juvenile company of Father Félix the necessity arose for me to support myself and to help my mother, whose health was a good deal broken, so I tried to get an engagement at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre. I was then fourteen years old.

At my trial appearance, at the very moment of my entrance on to the stage, I was seized with a terrible attack of nervousness and trembled in all my limbs. I managed to speak, but my voice shook with fright, and the audience pitilessly shouted, "Speak up, we can't hear a word." You can imagine how this tended to reassure me. But for all that I managed to struggle through my part. Exhausted by my efforts, however, I leant against the wall under a lamp behind the scenes and burst into tears. All of a sudden I felt my hands seized and, looking up, I found a gentleman I had never seen before who, wiping

my eyes with my handkerchief which he took from me, said—

"What are you weeping about, little one?"

"Because I acted so badly," I replied.

"Not a bit of it. You were frightened, any one could see that, but the audience also recognized that you have plenty of talent."

"You only say that to comfort me."

"No, I am quite in earnest. You will rise, become one of our great artists, and then you will remember Bouffé's prophecy."

"What?" I cried. "Are you the celebrated Monsieur Bouffé?"

"The *celebrated?*" he repeated, "that's going rather too far, but anyhow I am the actor Bouffé."

"Oh, how glad I am that you were not altogether displeased with my acting."

I felt quite cheered up, and Bouffé, who had been at the theatre that evening quite by accident, was good enough to speak favourably of me to Poirson, then manager of the Porte St.-Martin Theatre. The latter offered me an engagement, but said at the same time that he could only give me 800 francs a year, which was, of course, far too little for me and my mother to live upon. I therefore refused it, and another young *débutante*, who was later to become celebrated, accepted it. Her name was

Rose Chéri, and the future had many triumphs in store for her as an interpreter of characters in the plays of the younger Dumas. It is very up-hill work at the theatre for beginners.

In the critical position in which I found myself I went to call on Dennery, who as a friend of the Félix family had seen me act when I was with them. He was good enough to recommend me to the manager of the Folies-Dramatiques, a portly energetic little fellow who went by the name in the profession of Père Mourier. But Dennery did far more than merely recommend me, for he promised Mourier that if he employed me he would write a fine play for the Folies. Such an offer, of course, opened wide its doors to me. The manager actually offered what seemed the magnificent salary of 1500 francs a year. I was so happy I could have hugged him. He soon, however, gave proof that he really was very niggardly.

In the first piece in which I acted for him, *Micaëla*, or *Princesse et Favorite*, I wore such a simple costume I was quite ashamed of it. It was just a straight skimpy frock coming right down to my feet. I know that present-day taste would find nothing to object to in such a gown, for it is fashion for everything to fit close to the figure as if it were glued on, but toilettes were very different at the time of which

I am writing, much more complicated with endless pleats and frills and furbelows.

Very humbly I begged Père Mourier to let me have at least three flounces added to my skirt.

"Three flounces!" he cried, throwing his arms up in dismay. "You little wretch, do you want to ruin me?"

I thought it best to beat a hasty retreat. At the end of the first month when the success of the piece was assured and I had finally won the approval of the public I ventured to refer again to my three flounces.

"Well, well!" was Mourier's reply this time. "I'll tell the dressmaker to give you one, and we'll see about the other two later."

A month later I returned to the charge, asking for the two flounces I still wanted.

"One more only," was the concession now; "but for the third," said my manager, "you must wait a little longer," and it was not until another month had passed that I really got my dress finished. It was high time, for the play was changed four days afterwards.

CHAPTER V

The Boulevard du Crime about 1845—My portrait is placed above the altar in a convent—My friend Florentine cries with fright when Horace Vernet sketches her—The very pious treasurer of the Jesuit convent—The elegant and mysterious M. Hoffner settles Florentine in beautifully furnished rooms—The solution of a secret—Loiseau the thief—Death of Florentine.

At the time of which I am writing, that is to say about 1845, the Boulevard du Temple where the Folies-Dramatiques was situated presented an appearance of extraordinary animation. There were at least ten theatres on it, some of which, such as the little Lazari, had performances twice a day. Nothing else attracted such crowds as the drama. All the roystering blades of the four quarters of Paris used to throng to the Ambigu, the Théâtre Historique, and the Cirque Olympic to gaze enraptured at the representations of thrilling adventures, or of military pieces with lots of volleys of musketry, cavalry charges and blowing of trumpets.

So much blood was shed on the stage every evening at the popular plays that the Boulevard du Temple used to be called the Boulevard du

Crime. The audience became so passionately devoted to some of the characters interpreted for their pleasure that they sometimes showed quite fierce hostility to the actors who had to take parts inimical to them. One night, for instance, Briand, who had represented Hudson Lowe in a scene on the island of St. Helena when Napoleon was imprisoned there, was seized by some roughs as he left the theatre and flung into the basin of the Chateau d'Eau. This quite delighted him, and he gloated over it as a triumph when he was telling the tragi-comic incident the next day.

I can say without any boasting that the Folies-Dramatiques owed a great deal of success in those days to me. I very soon became the spoilt child of the public, and Père Mourier testified his delight with many an approving smile, but the old skinflint would rather have cut off both his hands than have added the smallest sum to my salary.

My personal appearance had a good deal to do with the applause I won. There can be no vanity in alluding to this now, for the Judith of that day is so far removed from the present Judith that I feel in speaking of her that I am alluding to one who has long since ceased to be.

One day a certain Madame de Munstal, with

whom I had some slight acquaintance, came to ask me if I would pose for the famous painter Lanthoine. He had been commissioned to paint a Madonna for the Mount Carmel monastery in Palestine, and was almost in despair of finding a suitable model when he happened to see me at the Folies-Dramatiques. He asked Madame de Munstal to persuade me to go with her to his studio.

I naturally hesitated before accepting the great honour of posing as the Mother of the Lord. But my scruples were overruled, and Lanthoine produced a work inspired by me which every one admired. At the last sitting I was still on the model's platform when a Carmelite nun came in to see the artist. She congratulated him warmly on his work, and then actually fell on her knees and prayed fervently to his representation of me. Soon afterwards the picture was sent to Palestine, and I could not help sometimes feeling secretly a little amused at the thought that in one of the most venerated sanctuaries of Christendom the portrait of a little Jewess actress receives the reverent homage of devout Catholics.

The painter Lanthoine used to give very brilliant receptions, and on one occasion when I was a guest I took with me a charming little blonde actress named Florentine. We two

slipped away from the rest of the company and amused ourselves like mischievous children in rummaging about in the studio.

Presently we discovered a hammock suspended in a corner, and we both quickly climbed into it. Finding it very comfortable we remained in it chatting away quite at our ease. I expect we must have looked rather picturesque lying there, for another guest happening to come in and catching sight of our two heads with ruffled hair emerging from our nest, and our arms and legs hanging down over the sides of the hammock, stopped to have a good look at us and evidently greatly interested with what he saw, he took a sketching book out of his pocket and began to draw.

"Whatever are you doing?" cried Florentine.

"Making a sketch of you."

"But I won't have it," was the indignant reply, for truth to tell my little friend was a bit over excited and had perhaps drunk rather more champagne than was good for her. She really seemed quite terrified. "Keep still," I said to her. "It won't do you any harm to be sketched," but she would not be pacified, and screamed, "No, no; if that fellow doesn't leave off I'll throw my shoe at him!"

The artist was only amused and went on drawing, but Florentine, clinging to me, said:

"Oh look, Judith, look; what big teeth he has; oh send him away, he frightens me!"

Her cries brought others into the studio to see what was the matter, Lanthoine himself amongst them, and as he came near us he exclaimed: "Hulloa, here's the great master Horace Vernet at work at this time of night. What an indefatigable man! Master," he added, "your drawing is simply ravishing!"

Horace Vernet, for it was indeed he, amused the company very much by describing Florentine's terror of him, but Lanthoine going up to her said, "My dear girl, you must know that there is not a lady here to-night who would not be delighted to be sketched as you two have been by such a great artist."

"Of course we should!" cried all who heard this speech, whilst Florentine, who was still trembling, asked me, "Have we really been sketched, Judith?" at which naïve question everybody of course roared with laughter.

As I have already hinted, the childish behaviour of my little friend was on this occasion the result of an exceptional cause, but even in her normal state she was the most deliciously frank young person. I was no older than she was, but I used to make it my business to look after such innocent lambs. I would often give her very good advice, warning her

to beware above all things of lovers whose protestations were not to be relied upon.

"Don't be anxious about me, Judith," she would say; "you may be quite sure I shall keep straight, and if ever you hear that I have gone wrong you may be very sure that the circumstances were quite exceptional. For instance, suppose any one offered me a wardrobe with a full-length glass?"

"Of course you would refuse to accept it," was my reply.

"Must I really?" said the poor child, as if overwhelmed at the thought of such a sacrifice.

After Lanthoine had painted my portrait he used often to come and see me and Florentine behind the scenes. One evening he told us that he had that day been to the Jesuits in the Rue du Bac, for whom he was going to paint a Crucifixion.

"There," he said, "I saw a most wonderful actor."

"An actor at the Jesuits!" we exclaimed in our astonishment.

"Yes," he replied, "and great as is my admiration for you two, sincerity compels me to declare that he excels you both. I was with the Superior in a gallery looking down upon a court. It was raining heavily, and all of a sudden I saw a bareheaded man wearing a dirty old overcoat

crossing the court in the drenching downpour. Presently he stopped before an image of the Blessed Virgin, knelt down reverently in a pool of water, and prayed for a long time. Nothing could have been more affecting than his attitude. His shoulders were bowed with humility, his bent head rested on his firmly clasped hands. He seemed to be pleading with heaven, yet acknowledging himself to be unworthy of obtaining what he asked. He took no notice of the tremendous wetting he was getting, and when he had finished his devotions he slowly rose with two great patches of mud on the knees of his trousers, and leisurely went his way into the convent without looking up.

"The Superior, who had touched my arm to call my attention to the man and had silently watched the scene, now said to me—

"'Well! what do you think of that? Isn't he a pious fellow? Every day at this time he pays his devotions to the Blessed Virgin, never missing, whatever the weather. What an example he sets us! He is our treasurer. I do not know a more saintly man.'

"'Your Reverence,' I ventured to remark, 'you know artists are allowed considerable freedom of speech. Will you let me tell you frankly the impression made on me by what we have just witnessed?"

"'Certainly,' was the ready reply.

"'Well, I'm very sure that your treasurer knew well enough that your eyes were upon him. He is a wonderfully gifted actor. An arrant humbug too. A really sincere man has no need to advertise the fervour of his belief by such mummery as that. Your treasurer is a rascal, I'll be bound. I'd take my oath on it. I advise you to beware of him.'

"'Oh! oh!' cried the Superior, 'that's what comes of your deplorably lukewarm religious convictions. You are unable to recognize true faith when you see it. You artists are all heathens.'

"'We are observers,' I began.

"'Unbelievers,' he interrupted.

"'When your treasurer has robbed you then——'

"'That's enough, Lanthoine; you'll annoy me if you go on.'

"Of course I said no more, but I kept my own opinion. Now what do you young ladies think of the matter?"

We both laughed, and agreed that the funds of the Jesuits were in very bad hands.

This story as related to us by Lanthoine seems to have very little to do with my narrative, but, as it will appear presently, it really was closely bound up with what follows.

Florentine's Distinguished Lover

One day little Florentine did not appear at the Folies-Dramatiques for several days in succession, and as she had pleaded illness as an excuse, I went to ask after her at the hotel I knew she was stopping at, but was told she had left without giving an address. Presently she re-appeared at the theatre and accosted me when she saw me with the words—

"Judith, you must come home with me and see what pretty rooms I have got."

"What, Florentine, you have got a home of your own? How has that come about?"

"Well, you know, he offered me a wardrobe with a full-length glass!"

What could I say to that? It was too late to do any good by remonstrances, and I went with her to her rooms. Her lover had done things well. The rooms had pretty rosewood furniture, and were so comfortable and luxurious that the most fastidious aristocrat would have found nothing left to wish for. Florentine proudly showed me drawers full of fine linen and beautiful under-clothing trimmed with lace. From a jewel case she got out a wonderful pearl necklace. In fact, the presents she had received in a few days represented quite a little fortune. It was evident that the donor was a very rich man.

"He isn't young," Florentine admitted to me, "but then he is *so* distinguished."

"What is his profession?" I enquired.

"Oh, he hasn't one. He has independent means. I really must introduce him to you. I am sure you would like him."

I very soon made acquaintance with this Nabob. He used to come and fetch Florentine to supper every evening after the performance was over. When he found out how much attached his lady love and I were to each other, he at once asked me to share sometimes in the amusements he provided for her.

He often took us both to the Deffieux Restaurant, which was then one of the most famous establishments in the Boulevard du Temple. There we were served with the most dainty food, and the most costly wines. In fact no expense was spared on our behalf.

The gentleman's name turned out to be Hoffner. His hair was turning grey, but he was still a good-looking fellow. He was always well dressed, almost smart, in fact, but in good taste. A frock-coat with a deep collar and long tails, well pulled in at the waist, a light waistcoat, and light trousers carefully strapped down, whilst a broad-brimmed hat surmounted his curly hair. He was clean shaved, which made him look rather like an Englishman.

He never went out without a flower in his button-hole, and was, in fact so *chic* in his get-up

that he might well arouse the envy of the most fashionable dandy.

Instead of trying to check Florentine in her extravagant fancies he seemed to take delight in encouraging them. He was fond of displaying quantities of notes, and used to take a bundle of blue papers out of his pocket-book and pick out one to pay with—then when the change was brought he would just take up the gold and leave all the rest for the waiter. He really was a most extraordinary man.

He was never to be seen in the day time. What he was doing then was a mystery. Perhaps he was asleep. That was what we thought. He was only visible after ten o'clock at night. Such pleasure parties as other men got up in the day time he used to arrange for the night, and we were so young and so full of high spirits that this peculiarity only amused us. On moonlight nights, after the supper which always succeeded the performance at the Folies-Dramatiques, he would hire saddle horses in the Boulevard du Temple, and about one o'clock in the morning we used to ride through the sleeping town into the suburbs, not returning sometimes until three or four in the morning when the dawn was beginning to break. Then Florentine and I would go to bed, but Hoffner would brusquely take leave of his mistress and

disappear, but whither he went we knew not!

At other times he would take us in a carriage to the banks of the Marne, wake up the sleeping boatmen, and persuade them to let us have a boat. Venetian lanterns were lit and suspended above our heads, and off we went with two men to row us, and sometimes a player on the guitar and a singer to make music for us, whom our host had brought out from Paris. Nothing was wanting to the success of the *fête*, and I think the dwellers near the river must have fancied they were dreaming when they heard the melodies we were enjoying, as the strokes of the sculls rocked us gently upon the flowing stream.

Every now and then Florentine asked her lover to come and see her in the daytime, but he always avoided giving her a definite answer. She insisted, however, declaring that she had never seen him with the sun shining on him, and she longed to have that pleasure.

"Don't forget," he answered, laughing, "that when Psyche held the lamp near Cupid's face he ran away; you are much more exacting than she was, for you want to look at your lover in broad daylight."

One evening when he was pleading very earnestly with Florentine for something he

wanted, I dont know what, he clasped his hands with so much unction that I exclaimed—

"Oh, Monsieur Hoffner, how, exactly like a curé you look; you must certainly have had a good deal to do with priests."

As I spoke he let his hands fall in a great hurry, and gave me a look which I could not understand but which seemed to me to be full of terror.

A short time afterwards he left off coming to the Folies-Dramatiques of an evening, and Florentine saw him no more. She was beginning to be very anxious about him when she received a letter from him. It bore the postmark of Mazas, and this was what it said—

"My darling Little Flo,

"I am in prison. I have been arrested for robbing the Jesuit fathers of the Rue du Bac, whose treasurer I was. I am afraid I shall not be set at liberty for a long time, as my crime was a very serious one. My name is not Hoffner, as I made you believe, but Loiseau. I know how very guilty I am, but it was all for love of you. When I saw you I could not resist the longing to call you mine and to make you happy. Perhaps I shall find mercy from her whose charm made me mad.

"Your lover, who will never cease to worship you,

"Loiseau."

When Florentine showed me this missive we both remembered the story Lanthoine had told us, and were struck with the penetration he had displayed.

"Loiseau," I cried, laughing; "why, the man was a predestined thief." But my poor little friend began to sob. She was perhaps thinking that she would have to sell her rosewood furniture, but I believe she was a little in love with the false Hoffner, too. The rest of her story is very sad. Less than a week after she got the news of her lover's arrest, consolation was offered her by the rich and charming young Duc de Bellecour. She did not repulse him, and soon became *enceinte*, her new protector seeming delighted that he was to become a father. But, alas! the poor child was fated for misfortune. One day she was officially informed that she was summoned as a witness in the trial of the treasurer of the Jesuits. The affair, which had dragged on for a long time, had only then come into court. Although she had done nothing dishonourable in the matter, the summons was such a terrible blow to Florentine that she was struck down by it. She had a premature confinement, and two days afterwards the gay and thoughtless little butterfly breathed her last. Poor Florentine!

CHAPTER VI

Théodore de Banville sings my praises—A golden chain—A skeleton instead of a beautiful young girl—Déjazet tells me of her extraordinary way of choosing a lover—A left-footed marriage.

You will remember that Dennery had promised Père Mourier a play for the Folies-Dramatiques if he engaged me. He kept his word. He gave the theatre where I was acting a charming little comedy called *Amours et Amourettes*, which had a tremendous success and in which I personally won much applause.

I must be forgiven for writing that last sentence. I don't like singing my own praises, and I have a cordial detestation for the vanity which leads so many actors and actresses to make themselves ridiculous in that direction.

As a general rule, when my fellow-professionals write their memoirs they turn the occasion to account by indulging in a long harangue on their own merits. They seem to look upon themselves as the centre round which the universe revolves. Acting before crowned heads as they do, they can readily assume regal airs and pose as if they were really as important as they foolishly believe

themselves to be, with the result that they weary the audience, which only laughs at them.

It will have been noticed that, so far, I have avoided this mistake and have preferred talking about others rather than myself. This will be my rule throughout my narrative, but, for all that, I must plead for leave to quote what the gifted poet, Théodore de Banville, wrote about me—

"Nothing could have been more charming than Madame Judith was the first time I saw her at the theatre.

"On the little stage at the Folies-Dramatiques they were interpreting a pretty scene from the time when the world was young, full of diablery, but with an undercurrent of pathos.

"The title *Amours et Amourettes* was redolent of the freshness of a May morning, and it was, as a matter of fact, one of the first days of spring so delightful in Paris on my beloved Boulevard du Temple. The vast blue vault of Heaven, the sunlit foliage, the pungent scents that came from the adjacent country, isn't it the French Venice, *our* Venice? (At that time Paris was not nearly so big, and the green suburbs were quite close to the Boulevard du Temple.)

"The actress was in wonderfully happy touch with the very spirit of the month of primroses. She, too, was in the spring of youth, no mere puppet with fixed smile and a shock of yellow

hair, but resembling rather the earliest wild rose-bud that fills the soul with rapture. She spoke, the animated expression of her beautiful lips astonishing every one. Her movements, her voice as she repeated her part were like those of some buoyant bird, and it soon became evident that to her was given Nature's own power when *en fête*, of arousing the emotions of her audience, who laughed and cried and went mad with delight.

"Is it necessary to add that she was loved to distraction? That she was like a dream made real?

"In the course of a week the passionate enthusiasm that began with the working classes, pervaded the whole of Paris, and night after night the Boulevard du Temple was like a fairy scene, with the scintillating and gleaming of the countless red lights of the carriages waiting in it."

Reading these lines, which to me, whom they concern, seem doubly charming, I ask myself if I am dreaming, if I ever really was able to arouse such enthusiasm, and I feel sad to think of the brilliant past gone for ever!

Alas for the ephemeral character of our art, that is as fleeting as the air displaced by our voices! Applause so soon silenced! Fame so quickly forgotten! Of all our efforts, all our charm, all the passion we threw into our parts, what is there left? Nothing! But yet there *do* remain

the few palms bestowed on us by such good judges as the delightful Théodore de Banville. I may well be excused for quoting it, may I not? The praise of such a writer has surely nothing in common with the insipid puffs that old actresses sometimes bring out of their pockets to prove their former triumphs.

One evening the celebrated Mademoiselle Mars, who had now come to take a part at the Folies-Dramatiques, sent to ask me to go to her dressing-room, and when I got there, she enquired if I was well up in the classic repertory.

"Of course I am," I replied, with a boastfulness that proved how ambitious I was. Could anybody dare to claim to be an artist who had not studied the works of our great fellow-countrymen?

"Well, if that is really the case," replied Mademoiselle Mars, who was evidently very pleased, "I will get you into the Française whenever you like."

You can well imagine how delighted I was, but I have already told you how Rachel, who was perhaps a little jealous of my success, had dissuaded me from listening to the suggestion of Mademoiselle Mars. All the same the proposal she had made to me did me some good, for Père Mourier, having heard that an attempt was being made to secure me for the Comédie Française, raised my salary from 1,500 to 3,500

francs. "I mean," he said, "to bind her to me with a golden chain."

Truth to tell it was a very little chain with small links, but such as it was it was nothing in comparison with the sums that I secured for the theatre. For all that, I expect it broke the heart of the mean-spirited old Père Mourier to have to give it to me. He determined to turn to the utmost possible account the popularity I enjoyed, and he actually went so far as to make me play in no less than thirteen acts on one night.

He composed a series that included a curtain raiser, *Claire*, in which I was the leading character, then a comedy in five acts, *Les Amours du Diable*, in which again I took the chief part; and lastly another comedy in seven scenes, *La Semaine des Amours*, in which also the heaviest work fell upon me. Total, as I have just said, thirteen acts.

You may guess that after working like this for some time I was pretty well tired out.

"Our love lasted for a whole week," said one of the characters in *La Semaine des Amours*—

> "Ah, our love has lasted still
> Thro' the happy hours!
> Hours far too short to fill
> With rapture such as ours.
> No bliss of love should pass away,
> Love once come should always stay!"

As for me I found that my "love" at the Folies-Dramatiques was altogether too long drawn out, and I longed for the happy moment when the three years' engagement which I had signed with Père Mourier should expire.

Some months before that day arrived, Roqueplan, manager of the Variétés, engaged me from the time when I should be free; and when at last I went to him full of relieved delight, his first remark was—

"Oh, how thin you are!"

"Did you expect," was my reply, "that the regimen at the Folies-Dramatiques was likely, to make me put on flesh?"

"Ah," cried Roqueplan, "that old wretch of a Père Fourier is a regular slave driver!" Then beginning to laugh, he added, "Poor Judith! Poor Judith! I thought I had engaged a pretty girl in perfect health, and you are a perfect skeleton. Now, my dear child, you must get strong and well before you appear at our theatre; I will give you two months' rest paying your salary all the time."

This respite allowed me to get back some of my good looks and I was quite plump again by the time when I made my *début* at the Variétés. The *rôle* assigned to me was that of Diane de Noailles in *Les Premières armes de Richelieu*, a vaudeville in two acts by Bayard and Dumanoir,

two collaborators specially noted for that kind of thing.

The plot of the little piece was rather risky. The young Duke of Richelieu, not yet fifteen years old, was betrothed to Diane de Noailles, but the actual marriage was not to take place until several years later, when the education of the bridegroom should have been completed by his tutor.

Now this youthful Don Juan had his own views on the matter and set to work to prove, by a series of escapades which involved duels with angry husbands, that he was quite old enough to be married. To crown his achievements he induced his *fiancée* to anticipate the joys of legal union, and presented her to his future mother-in-law as the Duchess of Richelieu, with the result that the authorities were only too eager to hurry on the wedding.

The charming Virginie Déjazet took the part of the Duke of Richelieu, giving a most spirited, roguish and humorous travesty of it, especially in the love scenes. She was indeed a most amusing companion.

One day she gave me a mirth-provoking account of the beginning of her connection with the famous Parisian publisher Ladvocat. She was then at the Théâtre du Gymnase, and the public simply idolized her.

One evening, she told me, a number of wealthy manufacturers, merchants and bankers sent her a joint invitation to a supper after the performance. When she arrived she found herself the only lady guest, but as she had plenty of pluck and was quite able to hold her own, she did not feel nervous and at first all went well. Her hosts treated her as if she were a queen. It seemed as if every one of them were head-over-ears in love with her and strove to be the one to win her favour. Every word addressed to her was a chivalrous tribute to her genius.

At the request of her entertainers, she recited a few of the most charming speeches in the parts she played and sang some of the lines which had won her the most enthusiastic applause. They all cheered her to the echo. All of a sudden one of her hosts came forward and, with great ceremony, knelt at her feet and kissed her hand. Then, rising at her earnest request, he made the following speech—

"Adorable Queen of the Stage, divine Déjazet, I am chosen by my friends here present to declare to you in their name and my own that we are every one of us enamoured of your charms, and what has brought us altogether round this table is our common admiration for you."

At this Déjazet roared with laughter, and said: "There really are too many of you. Besides, allow me to observe that I rather doubt your sincerity, for rivals don't generally get on so well together."

"It's true for all that, fair lady," continued the spokesman, "we have no desire to throttle each other in our rivalry for your favour, although we should all consider every drop of blood in our veins not too high a price to pay for your smiles. We are not quarrelsome, and the one who has the good fortune to be singled out by you may be envied but will not be molested by us. Now, most exquisite of women, we ask you to tell us which amongst us you like best."

The spokesman paused, and all his hearers except Déjazet herself cheered him to the echo and then went and knelt around her, each trying to get possession of her hands to kiss them, so that she was really rather at a loss to know what to do.

"Gentlemen," she protested, "such a thing has never been heard of since the days of Helen and Penelope and their many suitors. Come, come, there has been enough of this foolery. Such a thing as you pretend to wish is impossible."

"No, no, Déjazet," was the reply, "you

won't get out of it like that. We all know that your heart is still free, but some one is sure to win it ere long. Now we flatter ourselves that amongst us there are as many handsome fellows as are to be found anywhere, and we are all rich enough to indulge every whim of yours. You *must* choose, so you may as well do it at once."

"Won't you really let me off?" pleaded Déjazet.

"No, we certainly will not."

"Well then," she said, to the intense surprise of all, "take off your shoes and socks."

"What? what? what?" resounded on every side in every variety of tone of dismay.

"Yes, I mean it," repeated Déjazet. "Take them off. You insist on my choosing, and your faces are not enough for me to judge by."

"But we can't, it's absurd," remonstrated one and another, but the only notice Déjazet took of them was to say, "Hold your tongues and do as I tell you."

"But perhaps," one ventured to enquire, "you will condescend to explain the meaning of this caprice?"

"I must say none of you show much discernment," retorted Déjazet. "No great penetration is needed to understand that the best way to judge of a man is to examine his feet. Take

off your shoes, and I'll prove that I am right."

At last they all submitted, and the actress gave her verdict thus—

"Now, you see that gentleman there, who rather pleased me at first sight, wears cotton socks so he is evidently negligent of his person. He would not take any trouble to please a woman. I won't have anything to do with him."

Everybody began to laugh, and she passed on to the next.

"You," she said, "wear silk socks, but they are too long and are all in rucks; you are, apparently, too busy to look after yourself properly. You would be absorbed in your commercial affairs and I should have to play second fiddle to them."

To another she said, "Off with your socks. There now, you have got corns; you wear clumsy shoes and you walk too much. I want a man who is in the habit of driving."

The inspection continued amidst general amusement, and in the end the lady came to a pair of feet that were admirably cared for, and exclaimed: "Ah! here is a man who knows how to value leisure whatever his profession may be. See how beautifully kept his nails are. I am sure he goes to the chiropodist twice a week. He will have time to devote

himself to me. His big toes are a very good shape, he has a well-arched instep, and his ankle is well formed. He is evidently of an aristocratic turn of mind, with a taste for refined pleasures. Put your socks and your pumps on again, gentlemen. You, monsieur, are my choice!"

The happy man thus picked out was the publisher Ladvocat.

"Vive Ladvocat! Vive Ladvocat!" shouted all the unsuccessful competitors, none of them showing the least jealousy of the conqueror. Déjazet, who had seen him now for the first time, could not have made a better choice. To coin a word, his podoscopic method had succeeded admirably.

"Vive Déjazet! Vive Ladvocat!" they all cried again and again. "Hurrah! Hurrah! Vive Hymen! Vive Hyménée."

They had all had plenty of champagne and were in a great state of excitement, but the evening ended without further incidents. The next day Déjazet was installed in a very sumptuous suite of apartments, and the *liaison* between her and her lover lasted for many years. Their faithful attachment to each other became proverbial in the Parisian world, and those who knew the circumstances of their union used to call it a left-footed marriage.

CHAPTER VII

Déjazet falls in love with the shade of Napoleon I—Her strange love for artificial flowers—The funeral of Mademoiselle Mars—Bouffé renews his youth, or rather grows old in his own way—He acts comedy on the open boulevard—Boisgontier's coachman—I play in a piece by Henri Rochefort—The Duc de Morny and the Countess Lehon.

One of the peculiarities of the extraordinary little person who went by the name of Déjazet, was that she was desperately in love with the memory of Napoleon I.

One day when we were talking about Mademoiselle Georges, the celebrated actress of the Théâtre Français, Déjazet suddenly cried enthusiastically, "Oh, how happy she was!"

"In what way?" I enquired.

"In what way? How can you ask such a question? Was she not the mistress of Napoleon the First?" and she went on, "As for me, if my lips had been kissed by such a man I should never have dared to wipe my mouth again!"

She gave expression to her Napoleonic passion by incarnating her favourite hero in a piece called *Bonaparte à Brienne*, in which she won

very great applause, especially in the revival of it which took place during the second Empire.

Another of her fancies was to deck her home and her dressing-room at the theatre with artificial flowers.

"Don't you like real flowers?" people used to ask her.

"I do more than that," she replied. "I adore them. I love them as much as my fellow-creatures, and when I see beautiful roses in a garden I cannot help kissing them."

"But why do you not have them about you in your rooms?"

"Because it hurts me very much to see them fade. I assure you it makes me quite melancholy. Can there be anything sadder than to watch the petals becoming discoloured, shrivelling up and dropping off one by one? It is to save myself from a sight so depressing that I surround myself with artificial flowers."

She would often talk about the cartloads of flowers she hoped would be put on her coffin when she was taken to the cemetery. "I want them to be natural ones, because they will die with me." She had plenty of time to think about her funeral for she lived to 1875, but she had a mania even in her happiest and most light-hearted moments for dwelling on the procession to her grave. She had a strong desire to be

buried with a great deal of pomp. The one longing, the one dominant ambition of Déjazet in all her professional triumphs, seemed to be to merit an exceptionally grand funeral, with immense quantities of flowers and a large crowd of mourners.

A few years later, when, having left the Variétés I had become a member of the Française company, I saw the funeral of Mademoiselle Mars pass by from a window in the Boulevard Poissonière. Some friends had invited me to come to their house on purpose to see it, and they had also asked Déjazet, with whom they were acquainted. We found ourselves side by side, and I noticed that she seemed to look at the funeral *cortége* with something like envy. Truth to tell it was a very grand one indeed, and Déjazet kept exclaiming in a kind of ecstasy, "I never saw anything finer! Oh, what a lot of flowers! Oh, what crowds of people! . . ." then, suddenly turning to me, she said, "Oh, Judith, do you want to make me very happy? Well, tell me my funeral shall be as grand as this is!"

Déjazet was not the only star at the Variétés. I had the great pleasure of meeting there my old friend, the celebrated actor Bouffé. He was one of the most perfect artists it was ever my good fortune to meet in my long life. He was one of those who owed everything to art, and by

force of will he was able to personate characters utterly alien to his own nature. When nearly forty he appeared in the *Gamin de Paris* as a child of twelve or thirteen. He spun his top, capered about, and turned somersaults, in fact was Gavroche to the life. The next day, in another piece, *La Fille de L'Avare* (the miser's daughter), he was a decrepit, shabby old man.

It is, in my opinion, in these transformations that the skill of a really great actor is best displayed, and there are very few on the boards nowadays who possess this faculty of adaptation. They only play in one set of *rôles*, sometimes indeed in a single part, and that one in sympathy with their own individual nature.

Diderot, in his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, said long ago that the actor who gives free rein to his own personality always remains second-rate, and I quite agree with him, for art does not consist in the commonplace reproduction of reality, but in a new creation in which the significant characteristics of the personality to be evoked are brought into prominence. That is why the artist who relies little upon his own initiative, but from first to last realizes the spirit of his part and can consequently assume as occasion demands many different aspects, is infinitely superior to the fellow actor who always remains himself. At the present day, unfortunately, the

personality of the artist is everything, and many authors, realizing that actors and actresses are incapable of interpreting different characters, write parts specially for them. This is, of course, fatal to art, but it will readily be understood that in my criticism I make an exception in favour of artists of the highest rank, such as Huguenet, Max and Lérand.

I have seen Bouffé display his extraordinary versatility even in the street. I met him one day on the Boulevard Poissonière, and he said to me—"You just wait a minute, Judith, and I'll make you laugh."

He went to the edge of the pavement, and with bent back, hunched up shoulders, pinched features, head shaking piteously and tottering gait he had suddenly become an old man. Truth to tell I can't think how he managed it, but in less than a second he had added fifty years to his age, his grey hair aiding in the extraordinary deception.

Thus metamorphosed he tapped on the pavement with his stick, tottered to the edge of the road, made a few trembling steps to cross it, and then, seeing a carriage coming, started back and feebly endeavoured to step up on to the curb-stone again.

He repeated this mummery several times, many passers-by pausing to look at him, amongst them

a pretty litle workgirl about twenty years old. We all know, to their honour be it said, how tender-hearted the fair girls of Paris are, and Bouffé picked this one out to be his dupe. He cast a piteous, almost supplicating, glance at her and the girl said to him gently, "Poor old fellow, your dancing days are a long way off. You are nervous, are you not? Take my arm, I will lead you along."

Bouffé accepted her offer, and presently, about the middle of the road, he pretended to be terrified, and the girl had hard work to reassure him. As for me I nearly choked with laughter. When they had got safely across Bouffé thanked his companion, and then, all of a sudden, after putting his hat on the ground, he turned head over heels, after which he pirouetted several times, made his assistant a low bow, and left her simply petrified with astonishment.

"Have I amused you?" he enquired when he rejoined me.

"Yes," was the reply. "I shall not forget the scene in a hurry!"

I am obliged reluctantly to admit that when my success overshadowed his own, Bouffé's friendship for me became somewhat less warm. The greatest artists have their weaknesses.

He betrayed his jealousy when we were playing together in Lockroy's *Compagnons du*

Tour de France, in which Bouffé was not quite up to his usual level. For all that the audience applauded vigorously after the first act. As I had received a great many bravos during it I came forward with Bouffé to bow to the people, and he gave me a look that said plainly enough, "What right have you to be here? This recall is for me, and me alone." But I was not going to be intimidated, so when he bowed I bowed, and we withdrew together.

At the end of the next act there was the same applause, and we were in the wings near each other, when Bouffé said to me sarcastically,

"Well, mademoiselle, as you think it is *you* they are calling for, you had better show yourself."

"Dear master," I replied quietly, "come with me."

"No, no!" he said angrily, "I am more modest than some of my fellow-actors; I will wait till they call for me by name."

He was devoured with chagrin, and I insisted on his coming with me in vain. He only growled "No, no!"

We had to make up our minds quickly for the curtain remained up, and the audience was getting impatient. So I stepped out on to the front of the stage. Bouffé, who was bent on giving me a lesson, of course expected that they would shout

out his name to let him see that they wanted him too. But the spectators proved by their cheers that it was I and no one else that they were clamouring for. Bouffé so little expected this result that it almost made him ill. He only appeared six times in the *Compagnons du Tour de France* and then got another actor to take his part.

Amongst the other artists who acted at the Variétés at the same time as I did I must also mention the pretty little Ozy, who was at one time the mistress of the Duc d'Aumale, and later of Charles Hugo, son of the great poet ; but I shall have to speak of her again further on.

Then there was La Boisgontier, who was under the protection of a wealthy German banker. She used to come to rehearsal in a magnificent *coupé*, which waited for her outside, and the prancing horses of which were the admiration of us all. Her mother, who lived with her, generally accompanied her but used to remain in the carriage. She had been a dairymaid, and was now an enormously obese old woman with three or four double chins one below the other. She always wore an expensive rose-coloured or sky blue silk dress, and a hat of fine straw trimmed with ribbons of the most delicate hues. It was her daughter who paid

for this costly but inappropriate get-up. The generosity of the good-hearted little Boisgontier did not stop there, for her coachman was a milkman to whom her mother had been attached in the old days, and whom she retained in her service to please the ancient dame.

Sometimes we asked La Boisgontier why she left her mother waiting outside, and she would reply: "Oh, she doesn't mind, the coachman gets into the carriage to keep her company, and they chat together, or have a game at piquet. There's a groom to keep an eye on the horses."

Shall I just give the names of some of the pieces I played in at the Variétés? I have already mentioned: *Les Premières Armes de Richelieu*, *La Fille de l'Avare*, and the *Compagnons de la Tour de France*. I also acted in the *Abbé Galant*, *Une Fille d'Ève*, *Gentil-Bernard* and *Un Domestique pour tout faire*.

The last was a vaudeville by the Marquis de Rochfort-Luçay, father of the famous journalist. I was a farmer's wife in it, and had to sing a song on horseback, the beast prancing about and rearing, adding much to my difficulties but greatly amusing the audience. It really required a great deal of self-denial on my part to cut such a figure on the stage.

Henri Rochefort, who was later very hard on me when I was acting in his *Lanterne*,

because of the friendship with which Prince Napoleon honoured me, really might have remembered how obliging I was when I took the part in the *Domestique pour tout faire* to please his father.

The Duc de Morny, who was one of the *habitués* of the Variétés, used often to come to my dressing-room to compliment me on my acting, and he never failed to remonstrate with me in a friendly way for my good-nature.

"Look here, Judith," he would say. "Are you not ashamed to sing under such embarrassing circumstances? I know what a great talent you have, and how well you can speak. Do give up playing and singing in such silly parts, and try to get into the Française company. I'll do all I can to help you."

He had a great deal of influence at that time, and his recommendation was very useful to me. Deputy for Clermont Ferrand, he was then one of the most zealous partisans of the Orleans family, and the ministers of Louis-Philippe would do anything for him. No one would ever have dreamt that after the fall of the king the Duc de Morny would so quickly learn to accommodate himself to the new *régime*, or that he would exercise even greater power than before.

His wit, his handsome features, elegant get-

up, and dandified manners made him the admiration of the aristocracy. He was the very acme of fashion. One day in the ardour of some courtship he forgot to button the top button of his waistcoat, and all the beaux of Paris imitated him, appearing at receptions with theirs unfastened.

His career was not altogether without reproach. His enemies, for he had several, accused him of owing some of his resources to the friendship of a great lady of Belgium, the Comtesse Lehon, who lived in a splendid mansion on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, whilst Morny dwelt hard by in a mean-looking little house which certain malicious wits called the *Niche à Fidèle*.

The Comtesse Lehon had been very beautiful, but she was now past forty. She was ten years older than her *cicisbeo*, and was most anxious to retain his affection, so she hit upon a very simple device to conceal from every one the irreparable ravages that time was beginning to make in her appearance. She used always to receive her visitors in semi-obscurity, declaring that the daylight hurt her eyes. This gave her a pretext for putting up thick curtains at all her windows, and at night she only partially lit up her rooms, so that nobody could notice her wrinkles or her sallow complexion. She was

particularly fond of taking her guests into the garden after dinner and remaining there in the dark.

One evening when she had invited me to come to one of her gatherings, she asked me to sing something beneath the stars. Now the Duc de Morny was there too, and was paying a good deal of attention to a pretty little woman who was doing nothing to repel him. This exasperated the Comtesse beyond endurance, and she turned a pause in my song to account by saying in a peevish voice to her youthful rival :

" Really, madame, you are monopolizing M. de Morny. We have all cause to complain."

" Indeed not, dear Comtesse," was the immediate reply, for the little woman owed her hostess a grudge, " for the duke has just been telling me that he considers you quite beautiful *for the moment.*" As it was impossible to see a handsbreadth before you, the remark was peculiarly cutting, and it was with great difficulty that those who heard it restrained their amusement, whilst the Comtesse was obliged to bite her lips to keep down her vexation.

CHAPTER VIII

I take lessons from Samson—I give the Duc de Morny some hints about elocution—I refuse to appear as a ballet-dancer in *Les Saltimbanques*—I join the Français company—Anais Aubert an artless maiden of sixty—Old actresses in the *rôles* of young *débutantes*—Setting stars—Madame Dorval—Mademoiselle Georges.

OBEDIENT to the exhortations of the Duc de Morny I essayed to get into the Théâtre Français, and to qualify myself for admission I went to ask one of the great actors of the company, Samson, to give me some lessons.

It has been said of Samson that he was an admirable actor, but that as a teacher he was a positive genius, and this was perfectly true. He formed nearly all the actresses who shone on the boards of the Comédie Française about the middle of last century including Rachel, Rose Chéri, the two Brohans, Mademoiselle Bonval and many others.

He didn't show any very special originality behind the footlights; there was something cold about his acting, he did not give himself up enough to the inspiration of the moment, but calculated too precisely even the tiniest

effects, and some of his fellow-actors used to say of him—

"He is awfully strong, he strangled a lion in his arms and brained three hundred Philistines with the jawbone of an ass." To set against this raillery he was most scrupulously upright. He never strained the meaning of an author to make a part suit his own peculiar gifts. He did not, as do so many actors, interpret every part assigned to them, however serious, in a farcical manner, just because they happened, perhaps, to be endowed with a loud jovial voice. He subordinated himself, as it is the duty of all on the stage to do, to the writer of the play to be interpreted.

This was what gave such exceptional value to his instruction. He taught his pupils the very essence of each *rôle*, pointing out its relative importance in the play as a whole, and explaining to them how it should be interpreted, so as to resemble an individual wheel in some perfect piece of mechanism.

In a word, he taught them how to think, and how to reason logically. His advice could not make up for want of genius; what advice ever could? but it was wonderfully useful in training natural gifts, and showing those who owned them how best to turn them to account.

Would to heaven there were still at this late

day a master to whom our young actors and actresses would listen, and who would make them realize the necessity of understanding a piece as a whole, and fathoming the meaning of every detail before they venture to act in it. But, alas! novices nowadays never trouble their heads about such things!

Morny still continued to show the greatest confidence in my future career, and often used to say to me—

"You are lucky to have such a gift of elocution!" And one day he asked me if I would give him some lessons how to speak in public. He really was ashamed, he explained, of his ignorance of how to manage his voice, and his political ambition made him very anxious to learn how to enunciate clearly and with distinction.

"You must practise when you are alone," I told him. "Choose some long tirade in a play, the speech of Ruy Blas to the members of the Spanish Royal Council, for instance, and read it aloud. Read it over and over again even after you know it by heart. In the end you will have mastered even the most delicate nuances of its meaning, and the knowledge that you have completely assimilated them will enable you to secure almost automatically the necessary inflections of expression in your voice."

He followed my advice and repeated hundreds of times the vehement and spirited address of Ruy Blas to the prevaricating functionaries—

"Good appetite to you! ye upright ministers!
Ye virtuous councillors, whose honest ways
Of service rob the very house ye serve.
. . . . . .
Charles V, oh giant monarch! art thou slumb'ring then
Whilst servile hands barter thy sceptre—rend
Thy royal robes to clothe some shapely dwarf,
And drag the Imperial Eagle that should brood
With flaming wings above the universe
Down to the level of a scullion's spoil?"[1]

Did Morny, I wonder, remember those beautiful lines later? It seems doubtful whether he did, for he himself when the chance offered showed a tendency to turn his influence to account for his own advantage.

He still insisted on having lessons from me, but I was too modest as to my own powers to agree, and as I had then begun my course of instruction with Samson I advised the Duc to go to that most excellent teacher. So the actor who had formed Rachel now had for a pupil the half-brother of Napoleon III.

The Committe of the Théâtre Français came to see me act at the Variétés, and as a result decided to receive me into the company of the chief and most distinguished theatre in France.

[1] From Victor's Hugo's historical drama of Ruy Blas.—TRANS.

I Checkmate my Manager

When Roqueplan knew I was going to leave him, he exercised his ingenuity by giving me parts even more ridiculous than those I had already taken. He even asked me to act as Zéphirine in the *Saltimbanques*. It really was very difficult, now that the Comédie Française was awaiting me, to consent to appear in light-coloured tights and sing such silly insipid verses as the following—

"When but a little child of very tender years,
I joined a merry mountebank with many hopes and fears.
I wandered with him far and wide, I gaily danced and leapt,
How many women in this world as safe a course have kept?"

A strange preparation, was it not, for intepreting Corneille and Racine?

Roqueplan got very angry when I remonstrated, and I said to him—

"I will do as you wish on one condition, that the other parts are taken by those best able to do justice to them. Bilboquet, for instance, is an old fool addicted to theft."

"Well, who do you want to interpret him?"

"You!" was my reply.

He little expected this answer, and fuming with rage he turned his back on me and went off. He made no further effort to persuade me to interpret Zéphirine.

I made my first appearance at the Théâtre Français in December 1846. I feel bound to

confess that the actors already belonging to the company did not give me a very warm welcome. Amongst them there was a certain Madame Anais Aubert, who gave me a very cold shoulder. Though she was sixty years old she was the leader amongst those who took the parts of young girls, and as we were to play similar *rôles* she looked forward with some dismay to the comparison the audience would be likely to make between my youthful looks and her wrinkled appearance.

One day when I arrived at the theatre I came upon her in a group of actresses, and directly she caught sight of me she accosted me blandly with the words—

"Good morning, my pretty one. We were just discussing you!"

"Favourably or the reverse?" I enquired.

"Oh, favourably, of course. At least I was taking your part against those who called your beauty in question. They were all admiring your dazzlingly fair complexion, and saying that it could not be natural, but that you must use *blanc de perle* (pearl powder). I protested that you didn't, and as they stuck to it that you did, I said I would lay a wager with them to prove they were wrong."

"Did you, really?" I remarked quietly.

"Will you," she went on, "just let me prove

their mistake? Let me just wipe your cheek, to show them that there is nothing on the skin."

As she spoke she came up to me and rubbed my face with her handkerchief; but, to her disappointment, not the slightest sign of *blanc de perle* appeared. Full of angry spite—for, of course, her talk of a wager was all nonsense—she began to rub my face so hard that she hurt me very much. Then, turning to her companions, who were laughing at her discomfiture, she said angrily—

"You see, ladies, you were mistaken after all."

There was another old virago at the Théâtre Français, Madame Desmousseaux by name, who from the first displayed similar hostility to me. Once, when I had to act with her in some piece the name of which I can't remember, she was asked to rehearse it with me. She did so; but she was so cross at the trouble given to her that she did not condescend to do more than repeat the beginning and end of the answers she had to make to what I was to say.

"It's sheer waste of time to do what we are doing," she would grumble; "why didn't you go and see the piece acted when your predecessor was taking the part?"

This was the friendly way in which the old members of the company did the honours for the new recruits. But manners have greatly changed

since then, at least so I have been told, and I do not like to doubt the word of my informants.

I had been warned of the animosity I might expect to meet with when I first entered the Français. I had had some talk with Madame Dorval, the famous actress in what may be called romantic pieces, who had obtained such a brilliant success in the *rôle* of Adèle d'Hervey, the mistress and victim of the gloomy Antony. She confided to me all the mortifications she had had to submit to in the Théâtre Molière.

"You may believe me," she said, "when I tell you they hate original talent there. They are jealous of those who have made a reputation elsewhere, and they made my life such a burden to me that I had to cancel my engagement."

True, I suspected that some of the annoyances poor Madame Dorval had to complain of were the result of the unpopularity which succeeded her early triumphs. The wild enthusiasm for Rachel had done her harm, classic dignity having replaced the frenzied sentiment which had long been the rage. Even Merle, the husband of Madame Dorval, dramatic critic on the important *Union* newspaper, had, so to speak, sounded the lyric trumpet in Rachel's praise, eagerly proclaiming the superiority of tragedy to comedy.

"But, my dear fellow," his wife had pleaded with him, "don't you see that in crying down

comedy you are assassinating your wife?" She was right, poor woman!

Mademoiselle Georges, too, with whom I had several conversations, told me of the painful memories she had of the Théâtre Français, but I had known beforehand that she shared the ferocious hatred of Madame Dorval for the great and triumphant Rachel.

Mademoiselle Georges, who as a young woman had had a very dignified presence, had become frightfully stout about 1846, so that I found it rather difficult not to burst out laughing when one day I heard her exclaim:

"Rachel! what is Rachel? Why, there's nothing of her; she's a mere lath; I could swallow her in one mouthful!" She felt she had thus pronounced the doom of the great tragic actress beyond all possible appeal.

Rightly or wrongly, I did not myself attach very much importance to the bitter complaints of Madame Dorval or Mademoiselle Georges against the Comédie Française company.

CHAPTER IX

Drawbacks at the Théâtre Français—A new friendship—Prince Napoleon—Enthusiastic letters from an unknown admirer—La Mogador is unmasked—Céleste proves herself a perfect little demon—Guizot has an interview in my rooms with Émile de Girardin, whom he tries to bribe—My relations with Buloz, manager of the Comédie Française, are misunderstood—June 25, 1848: I cross a barricade—I kiss my little *mobile*.

The honour of belonging to the greatest theatre in the world made me ready to overlook many annoyances, but I must confess that the very limited and unsatisfactory accommodation provided at that time for the staff of the Comédie Française sometimes put me to great inconvenience.

My salary was ten thousand francs per annum, a sum which would give quite a wrong impression to those who did not know what expenses a prominent actress is put to. Those, however, who are conversant with the necessities of the life we have to lead will look upon that as a very moderate remuneration. My costumes alone, for instance, cost me quite half my income.

It was at that time customary for actors and

actresses to provide their own costumes, and it was not until many years later that Perrin succeeded in establishing the rule that the theatre should supply them. It was an excellent innovation, and did much to check immorality amongst actresses, for there is nothing so conducive to frailty as poverty.

The *sociétaires*, that is to say the actors and actresses on the staff, were no better off in many respects than the so-called *pensionnaires* or less permanent members of the company. At the present day each one of them has, in addition to his or her salary, at least forty thousand francs per annum as his or her share of the profits of the theatre, that, at the time of which I am writing, were practically *nil*. It was not unusual for three or four hundred francs to be the total amount taken every evening.

In a word, the Théâtre Français was then a very poverty-stricken realm.

However, I was lucky enough to win the heart of the public very soon, and also to make certain personal friendships that were to become very precious to me.

In 1847 I first made acquaintance with Prince Napoleon, who long remained my friend.

He was then twenty-five years old. The son of Jérôme, King of Westphalia, and of a German princess, Catherine of Wurtemberg, he was the

living image of his uncle, Napoleon I. He had the same strongly defined profile, lofty forehead, so smooth that it looked like polished marble, a nose like an eagle's beak, thin lips and a peaked chin. Seen full face, the physiognomy appeared more massive, the Corsican leanness being to some extent modified by Teutonic heaviness. "A Napoleonic medal dipped in German fat," Béranger later wittily dubbed him; but this was no apt simile when I first knew the prince, who was not yet stout, only robust-looking.

Before the Revolution of 1848, King Jérôme and his son were never in Paris for any length of time, for they and the rest of their family were exiled by the monarchy of July. Their presence in the capital was only tolerated, but for all that they often came there, remaining as long as they dared. Prince Napoleon took the name of the Comte de Montfort for the time being, and the celebrated singer Madame Stolz, with whom Pillet, the manager of the Opéra where she was engaged, was in love, was his mistress. She was very much enamoured of her young prince, whom she called her future emperor, and threw Pillet over for him, and when it was pointed out to her that she was risking losing her appointment at the Opéra, she would reply :

"What does that matter where Montfort is in question?"

Prince Napoleon had excellent taste, and often said capital things about plays and those who acted in them. I have many times had cause to congratulate myself on having carried out his suggestions or taken his criticism into consideration.

I now began to become acquainted with famous authors, including Victor Hugo and the younger Dumas, to whom I shall refer again presently.

Rather a strange thing happened to me in 1847. I must tell you about it.

It was in the spring, and as I had not been quite careful enough in guarding against sudden changes of temperature, I caught a cold which, though it did not prevent me from acting, led to my coughing on the stage sometimes.

Well, I now began to receive letters every morning, signed Céleste, full of the anxiety the writer felt about my health.

"You are so delicate," she said, "you are as fragile as some exquisite little statuette. You tire yourself too much. You cannot imagine how uneasy I am about you. When I heard you cough whilst you were acting yesterday it quite broke my heart. Do, I entreat you, take some rest, your health is more precious to me than my life."

And in another letter—

"What a divine talent you have, madame! When I listen to you at the Français I simply hang upon your charming lips. I drink in every word you utter. Your gestures appear to me angelic. I cannot be happy for a day without seeing you. I long to kiss your dear little hands and feet."

I said to myself, "She is evidently a little off her head, but she certainly knows how to admire," and, between ourselves, I felt a little flattered by her passionate admiration.

Her missives were generally accompanied by huge bouquets of the rarest flowers. She stripped all the florists' shops in Paris to do honour to me, and, as the flowers of one day were still fresh when the next supply arrived, all my rooms were constantly decked with them like some venerated shrine. One afternoon I was holding a reception in my own apartments and was surrounded by my friends, including authors, artists, members of the fashionable world, etc., when, as was often the case, a note was brought to me bearing the signature of the adoring Céleste.

"She was," she said, "waiting outside in the hope that I would see her." I glanced through her epistle and then said to the assembled company, "I wish one of you would read this aloud.

It is from a woman worshipper of mine. If it were from a man he would express his passion for me very differently and I should quickly put an end to the correspondence, for I should really have my fears for his reason and for my peace. Do read it, I beg of you!" I went on innocently, little dreaming what was coming.

The friend who took the letter from me, after looking at the opening sentence, turned to the signature and exclaimed, "Céleste! I am not at all surprised. Do you not know, my poor friend, who this woman is?" she added, turning to me.

"No!" I replied. "What can you be going to tell me?"

"Why it's Céleste Mogador. I recognized her writing and her inflammatory style at once!"

Then followed the painful revelation that my correspondent was a regular bad lot, only too well known, alas! to more than one of my guests. Needless to add that I did not admit her or accept any more of her flowers, and for a long time I heard no more of her, but, as you will presently learn, I came into contact with her again later under sad circumstances.

Early in February 1848 I received an unexpected visit from Buloz, manager of the Comédie Française. As he was noted for being very much wanting in courtesy, I was surprised at his calling on me. I hastened to bid

him welcome and thanked him for the honour he was doing me. He let me talk and only answered in monosyllables. I saw he was very much preoccupied. Presently he said abruptly—

"Judith, you know Émile de Girardin well, do you not?"

As a matter of fact I was on very friendly terms with the celebrated editor of the *Presse*. He often came to see me and never failed to have my praises sung in the paper under his control whenever occasion offered. He was more in the eye of the public then than at any other time of his career. Long an ardent partisan of the Government of July, he had ended by turning against it, accusing it of corruption and venality in bestowing honours and appointments and dwelling on the notorious jobbery of Guizot, then Prime Minister.

The middle classes who read the *Presse* gradually became the bitter adversaries of a Government they had at first idolized. In fact, Émile de Girardin really held the fate of the monarchy in his hands.

When Buloz had heard my reply in the affirmative to his question he went on: "Is he a man open to bribery?"

"Hum! hum!" I said, "You had better ask him that yourself. I should not like to be the one to put such a question to him."

"Could you perhaps tell him that Guizot would like to have an interview with him at your house?"

I reflected for a minute. It was very evident that some political intrigue was involved in the matter, but I felt that if, after all, Girardin did not like the proposals made to him by Guizot it was open to him to refuse them, so I promised to transmit to the editor of the *Presse* the communication Buloz was anxious to convey to him.

Girardin agreed to the meeting, and Buloz called on me again to find out what his answer was. He came once more later, after seeing Guizot, to settle the day and hour for the interview.

So it came about that the conversation between the minister weighed down by a sense of his unpopularity, and the journalist in close touch with the people, took place at my house. I saw them arrive one after the other. Émile de Girardin, a brisk, vivacious man, with a round, good-natured looking face; Guizot, angular and dignified, as stiff as a poker, and with a dry, cold manner, wearing a voluminous cravat which came nearly up to his nose and prevented him from turning his head.

Their interview must have been rather a curious one. There really was something hugely

ironic in the attempt made by the generally non-yielding minister to bribe the man who had denounced him more bitterly than any one else for buying the consciences of others. I heard nothing that passed, of course, for, as will be readily understood, I left my two visitors alone.

Two days afterwards I received a splendid diamond bracelet from Guizot, so I had every reason to suppose that he had succeeded in his attempt. Buloz, too, confirmed me in this conclusion, for, from what he told me, I gathered that though the Minister had not got Girardin to become a renegade to his principles—that would have been more than the public would swallow—he had induced him to promise to absent himself from France for a time.

For all that Émile de Girardin did not go. He was just strapping his portmanteau when the Revolution of 1848 broke out and saved him from what would have been a cowardly act. I wondered whether he had actually received his bribe, but I never found out.

The manager of the Comédie Française had been seen to go to my rooms so often in a single week that the relations between us were misrepresented, and I was supposed to be his mistress. The bracelet I wore on my wrist added confirmation to this belief, and I had

constantly to deny energetically the impertinent innuendos to which I was subjected, without, however, in the least shaking the general faith in the truth of the rumour. Buloz, I was told, had taken great precautions to conceal his movements, but he had been watched and his visits to me counted and reported on. I ended by letting the spiteful tongues wag as they would.

Amongst the many thrilling episodes of the year 1848, the one which took place on June 25 made the deepest impression on my memory. You know that the awful insurrection of June was caused by the breaking up of what was known as the *ateliers nationaux*, or national workshops, organized by the Provisional Government to give occupation to the unemployed, but which had become a great burden on the State. The unfortunate men who had been gathered together in these workshops, finding themselves suddenly cut adrift, to face their distress as best they could, rose against the Government with reckless fury.

The insurrection began on June 23, and it was on the 25th that the most terrible scenes took place. As for me, in my rooms in the Rue de Richelieu, I was consumed with anxiety with regard to my old mother who lived in the Faubourg du Temple. For two whole days I had been listening to the boom of cannon and volleys of musketry, that did not

cease even at night. It was one long, continuous, awful and sinister roar. The closed shutters of the windows looking on to the street, the ceaseless outcries from below, the close confinement in my hermetically sealed apartments, all contributed to madden me with terror for my mother, especially as I knew that the Faubourg du Temple was one of the most exposed situations in the town.

At last I could stand it no longer. I felt I must see her again at whatever cost. I would listen to no advice. I would rather have been cut to pieces than remain shut up at home any longer. So on June 25 I sallied forth.

I hastened rapidly along, full of the one idea to get to my mother, but presently I heard some one calling—

"Mademoiselle Judith! Mademoiselle Judith!" and there on the pavement I saw a detachment of young *gardes mobiles* sitting on their knapsacks, behind their stacked muskets, eating their rations. The open front of a shop served as their camp. It was one of them who had called to me, and he now went on—"Mademoiselle Judith, wherever are you running to? You will certainly be killed."

I did not know him. He was almost a child, not more than fifteen or sixteen years old. Such a handsome lad too! Was it the contrast

between his extreme youthfulness and his martial equipment which gave such a charm to his features? He told me he had often clapped me from the gallery of the Française; that he went to the theatre just for the sake of seeing me, and was always dreaming of me. He repeated that he was terrified at the danger I was exposing myself to in going out alone in Paris, which was in a perfect turmoil. He had been fighting the night before and that very morning, and declared that houses were burning everywhere and blood flowing on every side.

I told him why I was going, and that absolutely nothing could stop me, on which he offered to go with me, so as to help me if necessary. To this I consented, and when he had got leave from his commanding officer, we started together.

To describe all the horrors I saw during that walk would be impossible. My guide, without saying anything about it, chose the least perilous way, but that did not prevent me from noticing in almost every street barricades that had been taken by assault, but had only been partially demolished, and on which were still piled up, *pêle-mêle*, the dead bodies of workmen and soldiers. Oh, what a shocking sight it was! Old men in blouses, with tricolour armlets, had fallen on the broken paving stones, cheek by

jowl with boys in the uniform of the *mobiles*, white and blond hair alike clotted together with blood from gaping wounds. Half-naked women, blackened with powder and dust, had rolled bruised and bleeding into the gutter. It was, indeed, a hellish nightmare, and I covered my eyes with my hand to shut out the awful sights.

When we got near the Faubourg du Temple the scene became ever more and more tragic, for we were compelled to pass through the very heart of the insurrection. Many a ball did I hear whistle past my ears. I really think I should have turned back if my *amour-propre* had not made me feel ashamed to appear a coward in the eyes of my companion. My mother's rooms were situated beyond a barricade that the regular troops had not yet attacked. It consisted of a heterogeneous collection of beams, paving stones, overturned carriages, tables, armchairs, mattresses, etc., barring the street up to the height of the first storey of the houses.

My little *mobile* held the butt-end of his musket up to signify the peaceful character of our errand, and to ask the defenders of the barricade to let us pass. They challenged us, and then entered into a parley with us. My guide told them who I was and what I wanted to do. Truth to tell, at that moment I had

given up all hope of arriving at my destination, but, in spite of my fears, our boldness softened the hearts of the men of the barricade. A great hairy fellow in the black blouse of a printer, wearing a red Zouave fez, actually helped me to climb over the piles of *débris*.

"Citizeness," he said, "put your little foot here—now there—now there," as he pointed to the least shaky stepping-places.

We got over safely, and I found my mother, who had taken refuge on the ground-floor of the back of the house. She was quite unharmed, and as I embraced her, my anxiety over, I felt quite mad with joy. I could not, however, stop long with her, as my escort had to get back to his post in the Rue de Richelieu. Feeling quite reassured now, I determined to go back with him. I felt, in fact, like one possessed.

We went back by the way that we had come, and again had the great good fortune of escaping a second time any untoward incident. Really, when I recall that most extraordinary expedition of mine, it seems to me that I must have been simply demented for the time being.

When I left my guide, at the spot where his fellow *mobiles* were encamped, I gave him twenty francs. He coloured to the ears, and I saw that I had hurt his feelings. He wanted me to take back the money. Then suddenly,

changing his mind, he turned to his comrades, and said to them—

"Look! here's a louis d'or that Mademoiselle Judith of the Comédie Française gives to you to drink her health. I vote we give her three cheers—*Vive* Mademoiselle Judith!"

The cry was taken up, and repeated again and again.

"But what do you get for yourself?" I asked my young escort.

"Let me give you just one kiss," was the touching reply.

I turned first one, and then the other cheek towards him, after which I myself kissed him on the lips, and hurried away to my rooms.

CHAPTER X

Charles Blanc invites me to the opening of a railway—Interview in London between Louis Bonaparte and Louis Blanc—The pseudo-beggar Persigny.

One day in September of the same eventful year, 1848, Charles Blanc, then Minister of Fine Arts, called on me in my rooms in the Rue de Richelieu.

"Judith," he said, "I am going to-morrow to open the railway between Lille and Calais. Would you care to come with me? I should be so much obliged if you would repeat some verses on the occasion. Here they are."

He handed me a little appropriate poem, and I readily consented to do as he asked.

"Come and fetch me," I replied, "and I will go with you."

The next morning we started together. He was a delightful talker, and when we arrived at Lille I thought we were still quite close to Paris, the time had flown so quickly listening to him.

When we alighted Charles Blanc said to me:

"Listen to me, dear Judith, you believed me

when I told you I was going to open a railway, and it was likely enough, for we ministers of the Fine Arts are expected to preside at all the inaugurations that our colleagues do not wish to be troubled with. But the fact is I told you an untruth. I wanted to escape being spied on, and I thought if I had a young lady with me my trip would be supposed to be an elopement. The truth is I am going to see my brother Louis Blanc, who is an exile in London. I will be so grateful if you do not desert me."

I began to laugh and said, "A pretty *rôle* you assign to me. I am to be a weakness on your part to which your jeering spies are to shut their eyes. Do I really look so frivolous as all that? Well, I don't care. Anyhow, I am not going back to Paris alone."

I bought some warm clothes at Lille, for I had nothing substantial enough on to protect against the cold of the crossing. We went to Calais, where we embarked for England, and on our arrival in London we went straight to the rooms occupied by Louis Blanc on the second floor of a house in Piccadilly.

The celebrated Socialist opened the door to us himself. He was a very vivacious, loquacious little man, and threw himself into the arms of his brother. They seemed to have the tenderest affection for each other.

Louis Blanc and Napoleon III

There was another man in the room into which Louis Blanc ushered us. A man with a prominent nose, a thick dark carroty moustache and blue dreamy-looking eyes. He wore a grey frock-coat and held his hat in his hand, for he was only a visitor and was just about to take his leave.

Louis Blanc introduced him to his brother as Prince Louis Bonaparte.

This was the first time I saw the man who was to become the Emperor Napoleon III, but I had already heard a good deal of talk about him in connection with the Strasburg and Boulogne episodes.

He was just concluding his talk with Louis Blanc, and I heard him say: "I swear to you that I am a republican."

"In that case," retorted the Socialist, "what was the meaning of the meeting in Leicester Square last night, at which your adherents got me to appear through a deception, and at which they tried to persuade me that your dictatorship was the only thing that could save France? You were present! Why did you not impose silence upon them?"

"You know how difficult it is to moderate the enthusiasm of ardent spirits, but when I get back to France the Republic will have no more devoted or humble servant than I shall be."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"You *must* believe me. I want your confidence in me so that you may influence the democratic party in my favour."

"Don't depend on that!"

Bonaparte was silent for a moment, and then suddenly said—

"Give me your support with the people, and I promise you that in a year or two I will make you Minister of Public Works."

Louis Blanc received this prophecy with a scornful laugh and said—

"When you are Emperor, I suppose!"

"What does it matter what I am if you are a minister?"

"I a minister at the expense of the liberties of the people! Never!" was the indignant reply.

"Adieu, then!" said Louis Bonaparte, "you will live to repent your refusal!"

When the visitor was gone Louis Blanc said to his brother—

"You heard that humbug holding forth! He got all his Republican and Socialistic vocabulary out of my writings, and will turn it to account to deceive the people of France and confiscate their liberties. What a disgrace it is to me to have such a disciple!"

There is no doubt that Louis Blanc by refusing on this occasion to accept office under the

Empire condemned himself to remain an exile from his country until 1870.

When I started on the return journey to France the next day with Charles Blanc, the celebrated agitator went with us by train as far as Dover. We were in an easy well-padded carriage with big windows letting in plenty of light.

"How comfortable it is here," I said to myself with a sigh of content; but Louis Blanc, who was just about to pour out to us all his fine theories on the approaching happiness of the people, overheard me, and made my *sotto voce* remark the text of a burst of eloquence.

"We are comfortable here, are we?" he cried, "and meanwhile others are suffering from cold and hunger, or are exposed to the rain, the wind, the inclemencies of the weather, and all the ills that flesh is heir to. What I hope and long for is for every one some day to be as happy as we are at this moment in this luxurious first class compartment."

"And who will be engine driver?" I naïvely enquired.

Louis Blanc frowned at me, but Charles said: "Don't take any notice of her. She is just a mischievous girl."

His brother laughed at that and gave up the idea of answering my nonsense.

A little time afterwards, at the beginning of October if I remember rightly, my servant came to my room to tell me some one had called to see me.

"What does he want with me?" I asked.

"He did not say."

"What is he like?"

"He looks a regular gallows' bird, he is wearing a dirty old frieze great-coat too short for him, and very threadbare. I think he is a beggar, and that madame had better not receive him."

"Go and ask him who sent him here."

The girl obeyed, and the next minute came to tell me that the "beggar" was Monsieur Persigny, who had come to see me on behalf of Louis Bonaparte.

From the poverty-stricken appearance of the messenger I guessed that the master's funds were at a low ebb.

Persigny told me that as I was known to be a friend of Prince Napoleon Bonaparte it was hoped that I would interest myself in the fortunes of his cousin, Prince Louis, who had just been elected a member of the Constituant Assembly, and was about to take his seat in it, but he had no money, and wanted some badly.

"Rather an extraordinary message to send to a young woman, truly! Does he ex-

pect to obtain the resources he requires from me?"

"Not exactly from you," was the reply. "But we have been informed that you are acquainted with a very wealthy banker of Lyons, Monsieur Platsmann by name. If you would only put us *en rapport* with him, it is not impossible that in view of the brilliant future before the Prince, he might be willing to advance the necessary money; we are also aware that a certain Monsieur Carlier, who holds an important position in the *Prefecture de Police*, is a friend of yours, I would be deeply grateful if you could put me into communication with him. The Prince has many enemies. There are people in exalted positions who would not hesitate to make an attempt on his life. It would be a great thing for him to have a friend in the police force who would warn him of the plots and machinations of all kinds by which he is threatened.

"Could you not give a reception and invite Carlier, Platsmann and me to it? I entreat you on my bended knees to help us. France is at this moment torn to pieces by the forces of anarchy. She will not be restored to peace and happiness till Louis Napoleon rules over her. Save France, I implore you!"

"But I am no Maid of Orleans!" I protested, adding, "all the same I will not refuse to be useful to the cousin of Napoleon Bonaparte."

Truth to tell I was touched by Persigny's devotion. He looked like a faithful Newfoundland dog about to plunge into a whirlpool to drag his master out of it.

He had at one time served under the name of Fialin in the army, in which he held the rank of a non-commissioned officer, but all of a sudden he felt himself called to a new life through his attachment to Louis Bonaparte. He changed his name, and took as his motto the words, "I serve." He had been arrested at Strasburg, and again at Boulogne, condemned as an accomplice of the Prince, and imprisoned. It was, therefore, only fair that he should later have become first *aide de camp* of the President, and, later, Minister of the Interior, succeeding Morny in 1852.

The Prince had many other equally faithful adherents. I must specially mention General Fleury, who used to sleep across the door of Louis Bonaparte's bedroom when the latter was living at the Hotel du Rhin. There was fear of assassination, and the followers of the Prince who had staked their all in his cause were, perhaps, more solicitous about the preservation of his life than he was himself.

I managed to arrange for Persigny the inter-

views he asked for. Platsmann lent the future Emperor the money needed, and had no cause to repent, for he got very good interest out of the country.

As for Carlier, he was so completely won over to the Bonapartist cause that he proved himself a most zealous agent. I acted as go-between when he communicated with Persigny. Three times he warned the Prince not to leave his rooms at a certain time, an attempt on his life having been arranged. As it was a Louis we had to safeguard I used to sign my notes concerning him with the pseudonym of Louisè.

Carlier was later rewarded for the valuable information he supplied by being made Prefect of Police. But I, who really deserved a reward quite as much as any one, never received from the Emperor the gratitude that was my due. I must add, however, that in the end I gave him several good reasons for not liking me.

The friendship shown to me by Charles Blanc was very useful to me in the difficulties I had about this time with Lockroy, who had succeeded Buloz as manager of the Comédie Française. Lockroy never let slip an opportunity of annoying me. He used to give my parts to other actresses, refusing to let me play those which the public liked to see me in ; in a word, he kept me in the background as much as possible.

After a very heated passage of arms we had

had together I resolved to leave the Française. I at once signed an agreement with the manager of the Vaudeville, and Dennery wrote for me the *Bouquet de violettes.*

Charles Blanc, however, was so grieved at my leaving the house of Molière that he went to see Lockroy in his private room, and reproached him so bitterly for driving me away, that the manager placed his resignation in the hands of the minister. The incident was celebrated in the following lines—

> "Weep, weep for Lockroy, modern Holofernes,
> Ruthlessly slain by the great Judith's hand,
> Snatched from his high estate and now laid low,
> He who would fain have ruled this petty kingdom,
> This sorry stage, and ruling all misruled.
> And for this end turned Red Republican
> Only to be most justly beaten by a 'White.'"

Previously to 1848, Lockroy had, it must be explained, been a Royalist, but with a view to being chosen as successor to Buloz he had suddenly taken to professing the most ultra-Republican sentiments. The last line of the skit quoted above was, of course, a play upon the name of the Minister of the Fine Arts.

Seveste, who was a friend of mine, was one of the candidates for the post vacated by Lockroy. Not long before the incident just related he had given me a touching proof of his admiration for my talent. He had asked me to assist in a

charitable entertainment he had organized at Belville, and in token of gratitude for my services he presented me with a medal for which the poor of that quarter had subscribed. I therefore used all my influence with Charles Blanc in favour of Seveste, and had the pleasure of securing his appointment as manager of the Française.

There was, of course, now no longer any reason for me to remain away from the Comédie Française, so I paid the manager of the Vaudeville compensation for breach of contract and went back to the theatre in the Rue de Richelieu.

CHAPTER XI

I meet Victor Hugo at dinner at Alexander Dumas'—Victor Hugo's extraordinary visual memory—The fifteen stripes on the uniform of the Hussars—Victor Hugo's intense admiration for Louis Bonaparte—His opinion of Alfred de Musset—Impromptu verses of Victor Hugo—Collaboration of an omnibus conductor with Victor Hugo—Charles Hugo's love for the little Ozy—The lover is cut off from his mutton chops—How this drastic punishment came to an end.

One day when Alexander Dumas was calling on me he said to me, "Blanchette, come and dine with me to-night, Victor Hugo will be there."

Blanchette was a nickname given to me because of my fair complexion. I accepted the invitation. I knew Victor Hugo slightly, but had rarely met him. On this particular evening he was more interesting than usual. Generally he was very taciturn, and I generally found him as tiresome as any *burgrave*,[1] which is saying no little.

On this occasion he was in very good spirits, and I remember a good deal of the conversation that took place.

The presence of an officer of hussars in the

[1] "Burgrave" is a term of contempt in French society for those who are behind the age, especially in politics.—Trans.

uniform of his corps led to a talk about military costume under the first Empire.

"Hussars were dressed much as you are, in my father's time," said Victor Hugo.

"Exactly the same," replied the officer.

"No, not exactly," corrected the poet; "their stripes were narrower."

"I don't think so."

"I am sure of it. How many stripes have you?"

"Twelve."

Victor Hugo closed his eyes, and with one finger made a gesture in the air as if measuring the length of a uniform. Then he counted up to fifteen and remarked—

"*They* used to have fifteen!"

Alexander Dumas was rather disposed to think he was in fun. He happened to have an album of Imperial uniforms, and he now sent for it, with the result that the extraordinary accuracy of Victor Hugo's figures was proved then and there.

He went on to explain that he was gifted with a remarkable visual memory, and that he had but to close his eyes to recall anything he wished to remember as exactly as if the actual reality were before him.

Dumas amused himself with testing this claim, questioning his guest about other uniforms

represented in his album. Hugo stood the test triumphantly, giving answers of the utmost precision. He even went so far as to quote correctly the number of buttons on a dragoon's waistcoat.

In my opinion this strange faculty is also the chief characteristic of the literary work of the poet. He could not call up such vivid pictures or realize in a manner so convincing the personalities of his characters, if he had not the originals of the people and the scenes he describes actually present in his mind. He turns his singular gift to account to aid in the hallucinations he so skilfully produces.

At this same dinner he declared that he had mistaken his vocation, that he was really a born painter, not a poet, and he repeated : "Yes, a painter or rather, perhaps, an engraver. I see nature in black and white. I should have liked, in fact I ought to have been a second Rembrandt."

While we were talking about the soldiers of Napoleon I the name of Louis Bonaparte was naturally introduced.

Victor Hugo remarked that the Prince-President and he were on very good terms, and added that it was of happy augury for France to have a Bonaparte at the head of the Government again, for the nation loves glory, and the memory of the great conqueror who had won so much

for it would ever remain dear to the memory of the people. He went on to say that, after all, the first Empire, during which the sovereign so often fastened the cross of honour on to the breast of the common soldier with his own hands and under which the humblest might aspire through their own merits to the highest distinctions, was really quite as democratic as the Republic.

He wound up by confessing that Louis Bonaparte had paid him a visit in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, and had consulted him about the management of his affairs.

Alexander Dumas, close to whom I was sitting, leant towards me and whispered in my ear : "That's why Victor Hugo is a Bonapartist. The Prince is a regular wheedler. But, between ourselves, if he should presently, for one reason or another, give up flattering our friend, I am doubtful whether the latter will continue to be an adherent of his."

Dumas little guessed what a good prophet he was! Before the end of the year Hugo, who had been refused the portfolio of the Minister of Public Instruction, turned furiously upon Louis Bonaparte.

The vanity on which Dumas had dwelt with such amusement was displayed the next moment in a naïve and really most comic manner.

Talking of poetry, somebody quoted Alfred de Musset, and Victor Hugo was led to express his opinion on his illustrious fellow author.

"Yes," he said, "he has immense talent. He boasts that there are some who consider him as good a poet as I am!"

Dumas jogged my elbow, and it was all I could do to help laughing.

At the end of the meal Hugo treated us to a very strange exhibition. He put a whole orange, rind and all, into his mouth, and then managed to thrust as many pieces of sugar as possible into his cheeks. This achieved, he began to scrunch it all up with his lips tightly closed. In the midst of this operation he swallowed down two liqueur glasses of Kirsch and a few minutes later opened his mouth wide. It was empty! No one made any attempt to imitate him, possibly because no one else had teeth good enough for such a feat.

When we had left the table I was asked to recite some verses. Just at that moment I was feeling slightly indisposed and I had just asked Alexander Dumas in a whisper to try to let me off the task. He did as I wished, but as was his wont in a malicious way, for he said to his guests:

"Madame Judith begs you to excuse her. She is suffering a little. I saw her crying just now. Crossed in love."

Victor Hugo pretended to take these words

seriously, for he came up to me and told me love must be conquered and despised. He then suddenly began to improvise on that theme, giving voice to the following lines—

> " A jewel far too pure, a woman's tear,
> For any mortal man to merit here,
> A drop of heart's blood is a gem too rare
> To squander on a woman false and fair."

Alexander Dumas and all the company warmly applauded this *tour de force*, and Victor Hugo told us that he sometimes experienced a little difficulty in expressing himself in prose, and had to keep a guard on himself lest he should drift into poetry, and he quoted the celebrated line of Ovid, which may be translated : " Everything I tried to express became poetry," explaining that that was exactly his own case. He also confided to us his strange habit of composing on the top of omnibuses, where he declared his brain worked more freely than anywhere else and his imagination became more vivid. The uproar of the town, far from distracting him, acted as a spur to inspiration, and in the midst of the strangers about him he felt more alone than in his study.

I think much of what he said was really meant to be taken for fun.

He went on to say that this method of working had its inconveniences, as he had discovered that very morning. He had just composed two

alexandrines, but when he said them over he found that the second had only six feet—

> " Le grand fleuve de la vie emporte dans son cours
> . . . les haines, les amours." [1]

Whatever had become of the first hemistich of the second line ? Then he suddenly remembered that at the critical moment the conductor had come to him and said, " Votre place, Monsieur," (" Pay please, sir,") and that these were the missing words he unconsciously incorporated in his verse :

> " Le grand fleuve de la vie emporte dans son cours
> Votre place, Monsieur . . . les haines, les amours."

We took this confidence for what it was worth, that is to say as an amusing joke.

It was about the middle of 1849 that the dinner I have just been telling you about took place. To the following year belongs a very entertaining incident in which the poet himself and his eldest son Charles played their parts. The latter was a handsome young fellow, full of life and spirit. He often used to come to my evening receptions and to the dinners I gave to my intimate friends. But there came a time when his character underwent a sudden change. No longer happy and eager, he became gloomy and

[1] The wide river of life bears away on its rushing course
. . . hatreds and loves.

silent. I soon began to wonder what had so transformed him, but, of course, I could make a shrewd guess of the reason in the case of a man of his age.

The first time I got a chance of speaking to him alone, I remonstrated gently with him on his depression and discontent, telling him that his melancholy was grieving all his friends.

He gave a long sigh and looked ready to burst into tears.

"I see how it is," I said. "Why, what an unreasonable booby you are to get into such a state about some silly coquette who has disdained you. Is she so very beautiful?"

He nodded his head in the affirmative.

"And inexorable?"

He made a similar gesture.

"Well, there are not many of whom that can be said. Why did you go and pick out one of the exceptions. There is not a chance for you. Will it be indiscreet to ask what her name might be?"

"Alice Ozy."

"What, little Ozy of the Variétés who was the mistress of the Duc d'Aumale, and has now given her heart to Brûlé, the fabulously rich contractor? Well, you're a bold fellow to hope to compete with a Crœsus. All the same you have not bad taste; but young and fascinating

though you are, you may be sure she will never prefer you to her Nabob. Come, come, my dear friend, you must try to forget the little Ozy and console yourself with some one else."

Wasn't I stupid to try to talk reason to a man in love? Charles Hugo did not even listen to me, but persisted in his courtship of the cruel adored one. He was at every play in which she appeared, casting passionate and despairing glances at her.

He wrote verses to her full of protestations of the sincerity of his devotion, and of reproaches for preferring a wealthy lover to him. And, would you believe it? he actually won his cause in the end. Women really are not so bad as they are painted, and his constancy touched the little Ozy at last. She dismissed her contractor and gave her heart to the young poet. When a woman is disinterested at all she doesn't do things by halves, and she seemed to love Charles Hugo all the more because of what she had sacrificed for him. She threw over all her other admirers for his sake and even got into debt so as to be more truly in accord with him. When she was besieged behind the scenes by wealthy suitors she used to call them all manner of opprobrious names, or just take no notice of them at all, but keep on repeating, "Where is my Charles? Charles, where are you?" Then, when he appeared, she

would fling her arms round his neck and cover his face with kisses, quite regardless of the lookers-on, or if they seemed shocked at her way of behaving she would look round at them with eyes lit up with happiness, and remark, "Oh, how stupid they are!" The two were both gloriously happy and I need scarcely add that Charles quite threw off his sadness.

But there was a reverse side to the medal. Charles was living then with his parents in the Rue de la Tour d'Auvergne, and as pretty well all his time was taken up with love-making, the little Ozy being very exacting, he became terribly irregular in his appearances beneath the paternal roof. He used sometimes to come in at the end of a meal or very late at night, so that the servant had to sit up for his return before she could lock up.

Victor Hugo became angry. He suspected a snake in the grass. And without waiting to find out what was wrong he determined to deal severely with his son.

There was generally a mutton chop for each of his sons at the midday repast, and the poet issued orders that if Charles were not there when they sat down to table there should be no chop for him.

This barbarous threat did not have the expected effect. Charles told his lady love about

it and she roared with laughter. After she had heard it she always said teasingly when twelve o'clock approached and he wanted to leave her, " Oh, you love me very much, of course, but not so much as mutton chops."

So Charles used to stop with her to prove the contrary, with the result that henceforth he got nothing but vegetables to satisfy his hunger at lunch at home.

Now occurred a really marvellous incident.

The young, luxury-loving Philoxène Boyer used at that time to spend his whole fortune on entertaining his fellow authors in regal fashion. At a sardanapalian dinner he was giving at Bignon's restaurant, Victor Hugo and the little Ozy were accidentally placed side by side. The great man no sooner looked at his neighbour than he fell head over ears in love with her. Throughout the meal he was deaf to everything that was said to him and answered at random. When his host asked him if he admired Goethe's ballads, he replied, " Yes, give me some with a little sauce," and when every one roared with laughter he could not imagine what amused them. His mind was completely absorbed by the girl beside him.

Little Ozy was quite embarrassed by his attentions, and saw that all the guests were watching the poet, he himself being the only one not to notice it. Those who knew of her relations with Charles were whispering aside.

Victor Hugo Repulsed

At the end of the evening, Victor Hugo was surprised and a good deal put out at finding how little impression he had made on the lady he had singled out. He was not accustomed to being repulsed by the fair, and angrily asked himself what the little actress of doubtful reputation meant by turning up her nose at him, the favourite of the Muses. He tried to forget her, but it was all in vain. Piqued by an indifference so little expected, and as much smitten as his son had been, he laid furious siege to the affections of Alice Ozy. In his turn he sent her impassioned verses which the girl showed to Charles, who let me see them. The situation, comic as it was, had its painful aspect, and, truth to tell, Victor Hugo was not very well inspired in what he wrote on the occasion. I have kept some of his amorous effusions, which certainly do not rank amongst his best productions. Here is a specimen :

"I am the oak, the crimson rose art thou,
Towards thee, fairest flower, I must incline,
Less wonderful my strength, my mighty bough
Than the sweet grace and perfume which are thine."

He himself did not preserve them, a sure sign that he thought them bad, and he was not far wrong. The simile of a tree bending down to a rose is somewhat grotesque and calls up rather an absurd picture. And then the little Ozy !

I know he is talking of a flower, but how he does mix things up.

After all I am not at all surprised that the quatrain quoted above was not good, for its author was really quite bowled over, and everybody knows that the greatest poets are only able to interpret feigned emotions and that true passion paralyses them.

The little Ozy, it must be added, remained adamant to her elderly admirer in spite of poems written in her honour and the offer of parts specially composed for her in grand plays to be written by Victor Hugo. It was all of no avail, and at last the poet sent her a letter couched in the following terms:

"I will give you everything, everything you choose to ask. What can I do for you, my dear one?"

To which he received the following laconic reply—

"I want you . . . to give him back his mutton chop!"

These few words opened Victor Hugo's eyes to many little things which had hitherto escaped his notice. He suddenly became aware where his son's affections were placed and yielded the palm to him with a good grace, for he magnanimously gave him back his mutton chop.

CHAPTER XII

I draw the Prince-President into a wasp's nest—A stormy evening at the Comédie Française—I take Prince Napoleon to have lunch with the political prisoners at the Conciergerie—Revolutionary toasts proposed by a Bonaparte—Thanks to the skill of the hairdresser Félix, Eugénie de Montijo's hair is changed from red to pale gold.

In November, 1851, on the eve of the Coup d'Etat, *Marion Delorme* was put on the stage at the Théâtre Français, and I won a good deal of applause in the leading part. Immediately after, however, on December 2, Victor Hugo was exiled, and his play was suspended by the authorities. I was inconsolable at losing such a chance of winning fresh renown, and quite apart from my personal interest in the matter, I was very sorry for the withdrawal of such a fine piece.

I therefore went to the Elysée to see the Prince-President, and ask him to rescind the order he had given, feeling sure that the good turn I had done him such a short time before would plead my cause with him. I was not mistaken, for he received me courteously, though with a certain distance peculiar to him, retaining throughout our interview the somewhat dis-

agreeable expression of countenance that was characteristic of him.

He crowned his complaisance by promising to go himself the next day to see *Marion Delorme* at the Comédie Française. "Tell your manager I will be there," he said. "I hope my presence at a play by Victor Hugo will set an example of tolerance and tend to the pacification of differences."

I thanked him warmly. I was quite mad with delight. I flew down to my carriage which, in accordance with my order to the coachman, dashed along at full speed to the theatre. I lost not a moment in making my way to the manager's room, crying out to every one I met that the Prince-President would be at our performance of *Marion Delorme* the next day. The news quickly went the round of Paris. Perhaps I should have been wiser to keep my own counsel, at least that is the conclusion at which I arrived when things turned out as they did.

When the curtain went up the next evening there was no Prince-President in his box, and all through the first act he was conspicuous by his absence. I don't know how it was, but the attitude of the audience made a painful impression on me. There was no applause, nor was there any hissing, but a kind of frigid feeling of expectancy seemed to pervade the house.

The Prince President Insulted

In the middle of the second act Louis Bonaparte made his appearance. There were a few cheers and one long shrill whistle. The Prince started slightly, and then assumed an impassive demeanour, whilst the man who had whistled was turned out.

Nothing particular happened during the rest of the second and the whole of the third act, but the ominous silence which had prevailed from the first continued.

During the fourth act, when the Marquis de Nangis says to the king—

> "Behold us, sire, fresh from the bloody strife,
> The tocsin echoing still the knell of life.
> Oh, be more niggard of your headsman's skill."

A kind of shudder suddenly passed through the audience, resembling the rising of a wind which abruptly cuts through the heavy atmosphere that often precedes a storm. And when the words were pronounced—

> "Our hearts' blood, sire, is no mere gentle dew,
> Nor is grain gathered from a blood-soaked soil!"

A perfect tempest of cries and hisses arose, the whole house shouting "Vive, Hugo! Vive Hugo! Down with the tyrant! Down with the assassin! Assassin! Assassin!"

It was very evident that all Victor Hugo's friends had gathered together for the occasion,

and that the demonstration was in obedience to a pre-arranged signal, so unanimous was the outcry.

I looked up at Louis Bonaparte. He was perfectly livid, but not a muscle of his face moved ; though I could see that the hand on the red velvet of the edge of the box was fidgeting nervously with his gloves.

" Assassin ! Assassin ! " greeted pretty well every speech that was made until the end of the piece.

I who had enticed the President into this wasp's nest wished myself buried fathoms deep in the earth.

Louis Bonaparte remained to the end of the play without flinching, but you will not be surprised to hear that the next day the acting of *Marion Delorme* was prohibited. I fancy the Prince bore me a grudge on account of this incident, and a little while later I gave him another cause for displeasure.

It was at the beginning of 1852. Vacquerie, who had founded the *Événement*, Paul Meurice, who was the editor, and the two sons of Victor Hugo, François and Charles, who both wrote for that paper, had all been incarcerated in the Conciergerie on account of articles from their pens against the Government.

Now I was a friend of them all, and I knew

that they did not mind their imprisonment very much, for they were allowed to meet in their cells, which were a good size and fairly comfortable, and they used to keep each other's spirits up with their natural good humour. Still I thought a visit from me would give them pleasure, and anyhow I liked the idea of going to see them. So I asked Carlier, who was now Prefect of Police, to give me a permit to go and see them. He did so at once, and I wrote to Vacquerie to fix the day for me to go to lunch with him and his companions in captivity.

The very morning I was going, I met Prince Napoleon on my doorstep.

"You had better come with me," I said to him.

"Where are you going?" he enquired.

I told him, and he exclaimed, "What, you want me, a Bonaparte, to go to the prison and sit at the same table with the enemies of the Prince-President!"

"Do as you like," was my reply. "I put no constraint upon you. . . . Au revoir!"

"After all," he remarked, "those *Événement* fellows are very good company. . . . I really like them very much. . . . And they show plenty of pluck in their opposition to my cousin. . . . I have half a mind to say to them . . . And why shouldn't I go? I don't expect Louis

to give account to me of his intimates, so what right has he to interfere with mine ? "

" You mean to come then ? "

" You really are a mischievous little demon," was his retort as he got into my brougham after me.

At the Palais Royal he made my coachman stop, and told the footman to buy a lot of provisions and choice wine.

" *Visitare captivos* is one of the seven works of mercy," he remarked as he piled up pastry, hams, and bottles of Bordeaux and champagne on the seat between us.

We had quite a business of unloading to go through when we at last arrived at the Conciergerie.

I showed my passport to a turnkey, and he asked to see that of my companion, who replied by giving his name.

As we were being ushered through the passages to the cells of my friends I saw some one I knew approaching. It was Dr. Guise. He had been my medical adviser for a long time, and I was very grateful to him for the care with which he had watched over me during the last epidemic of cholera. He used to come up to my rooms every morning to see me and keep up my courage, and these visits were a very great stay to me at a time when dread of the disease

wrought nearly as much havoc amongst the population as the cholera itself.

Just then Dr. Guise was serving his time for a homicide which he had committed through a mistake. He was doctor to the Bicêtre Asylum, and had been consulted by the manager of that establishment, for whom he wrote a soothing prescription containing laudanum. No sooner had the patient taken a dose of the medicine than he fell down dead. The dose of laudanum had been a hundred times too strong. Had the mistake been made through carelessness on the part of the doctor, or was it the result of his abominable writing, that the chemist had read wrongly? Whichever it was, he had to pay for it under lock and key.

I stopped and told him how sorry I was for him.

"Oh," he said, "I don't mind the prison much. I have to put up with something much worse than that."

"What do you mean?"

"My wife has got leave to share my cell."

Prince Napoleon and I laughed heartily.

"Laugh as much as you like," said the doctor, "but it is no laughing matter for me I can tell you!"

At this moment the wife appeared on the scene, come to look for her husband. Ill-temper radiated from every feature.

"Ah, that's how it is!" she cried. "You are amusing yourself in elegant society whilst I am getting your meals ready. This is all the reward I get for my devotion in coming to soften your imprisonment."

"Good heavens," sighed the doctor, "as far as I am concerned, I wish they'd revive all the old abolished tortures—the wheel, the rack, the pincers and red-hot irons—and deliver me from conjugal virtue!" He could say no more, for his Xanthippe already had him by the arm, which she was pinching viciously as she led him away.

We were heartless enough to go on laughing, and the little incident was an excellent prelude to the happy hours we passed afterwards with our friends of the *Événement*.

There never was a merrier or more noisy meal. Vacquerie, Meurice and the two Hugos all wore red caps they had got for the occasion I don't know how, and they produced others of a similar kind for me and the Prince to don.

At every successive course and the opening of every fresh bottle of wine we sang a verse of the Marseillaise.

"To liberty!" cried Vacquerie, raising his glass, and the Prince clinked glasses with him.

"Death to the tyrant!" shouted Meurice. "Judith, we count on you to behead the new Holofernes!"

At this juncture a warder came to inform us respectfully that every one in the prison could hear us, and a crowd had collected outside our door.

Then the Prince, who, I think, had had a little too much wine, filled up his glass, and going out into the passage gave the toast "To the destruction of all Bastilles!"

The next morning all the opposition newspapers were full of our escapade. It was stated that the Prince-President was disowned by his own family, and that his own cousin had joined the opponents of the Coup d'État.

Louis Napoleon heard that it had been through me that Prince Napoleon had joined the party at the Conciergerie, and ever afterwards hated me bitterly.

For all that, the next year when the Empire was proclaimed I was asked to recite some verses at the ceremony of giving of the Imperial eagles to the army.

I recited a poem written by Méry and called "The Return of the Eagles." My recitation evidently gave satisfaction, for Bacciochi, the Emperor's chamberlain, came to me and presented me with a pair of golden earrings representing bees, the wings of which were studded with diamonds.

The golden earrings brought to me by the

chamberlain were the only present ever made to me by the Emperor, who never gave me any other reward for the services I had rendered him in the past.

In 1853, as is well known, took place the marriage of Napoleon III with Eugénie de Montijo. I cannot exactly boast of having brought about this union, but I may certainly claim to have had something to do with it.

About 1847 the Comte de Galve, the Spaniard to whom, I think, I have already referred, and who was a friend of mine, told me about a relation of his, a beautiful woman then living in Spain, who was very anxious to see the Paris fashions. The lady in question was the young Countess of Teba, generally known as Eugénie de Montijo. Glad to oblige the Count, I was in the habit, for a year or two, of sending him drawings of the costumes and ornaments of each season, which I specially admired, for him to transmit to the Countess. Sometimes I even sent manuscript notes on them. They were all duly sent to the future Empress, who thus really learnt from me the way to dress in the elegant Parisian style—a knowledge that won for her a throne.

An accidental circumstance also placed me under some obligation to Napoleon III's future wife.

Eugénie de Montijo as an Artist

The artist Müller, now almost forgotten but then in the enjoyment of a great reputation, had excuted a very good portrait of me. One of his most celebrated pictures was the one called "La dernière charette"[1] (The last cart-load), representing André Chénier being taken to execution.

The Comte de Galve, who had seen my portrait in Müller's studio, was so charmed with it that he begged the artist to do a replica of it for him, and when it was finished he took it with him to Spain. On his arrival at his destination he found that the portrait had been considerably damaged in transit, and Eugénie de Montijo, when she saw it, was greatly distressed at its condition. She was rather an adept at pastel herself, so she offered to do what she could to repair the mischief. Thus it came about that she, who was soon to become the Empress of the French, touched up a likeness of me.

A little later, the Comte de Galve was back from Spain, and came to tell me that *La belle rousse*, as he called the Countess, had not been able to resist the temptation of coming to shine in Paris, and that she was actually within the walls of the capital.

[1] The poet Chénier was beheaded on June, 25, 1794, three days before the close of the Reign of Terror.—TRANS.

The term *rousse*[1] will surprise those who remember the Empress's beautifully light hair, but it was not always light. The reddish hue natural to it rather detracted from her charms, and once more she consulted the Comte de Galve, how best to remedy the defect. He, as usual, hastened to me for my advice, and I went to interview a certain Félix, a regular capillary artist, who knew many secrets of dyeing, and whom I told to go and see the Countess of Teba. It was through his skill that the hair of Eugénie de Montijo acquired the exquisite pale golden tint which excited the admiration of all her contemporaries and helped to bewitch Napoleon III. So that you see it was indirectly thanks to me, who sent Félix to her, that the Countess Teba became the wife of the Emperor.

A dye, you will perhaps remonstrate, does not make an Empress. But remember Cleopatra's nose, and how Pascal wrote that if it had been shorter the whole course of the world would have been changed.

[1] Russet is the nearest English equivalent for *rousse*.—TRANS.

CHAPTER XIII

An unpublished version of the death of the Duke of Reichstadt —Prince Camerata's opinion of his family—His money difficulties—My efforts to save him—His suicide and that of his mistress, Marthe—His Mother's unnatural behaviour.

One day Prince Napoleon brought me a cast of the head of the Duke of Reichstadt. He had already given me one of the head of the great Emperor. I compared, not without emotion, these two heads in the sleep of death. That of the father was superbly calm. The lofty, powerful but delicately chiselled brow, with the beautifully moulded curvature of the temples, produced the impression of a dominating intellect. The broad, deep sockets of the eyes were suggestive of profound thought; the slightly prominent cheek-bones, the thin lips, and the square chin seemed to radiate forth authority and energy; but the most salient characteristic of the haughty countenance as a whole was a kind of Olympian composure.

In the features of the Duke of Reichstadt the great resemblance to those of Napoleon I was recognizable, but they were drawn and distorted

as if by some terrible anguish. The majestic brow of the father was channelled in the son with deep lines of suffering, and anguish seemed to look forth from the solemn orbits of the eyes; the attenuated nose with its sharp ridge, the salient cheek-bones, and the distorted imperious lips had a painfully sneering expression, whilst the powerful chin was converted into a drooping jaw.

"Poor little fellow!" I could not help saying to myself.

"You may well say so," remarked Prince Napoleon. "It was that wretched Austrian Court which reduced him to that state, dwarfing his intellect by its bigotism, stifling his ambition by concealing from him the brilliant exploits of his father, and finally doing him to death with poison!"

"Poison!" I cried. "What are you talking about? Did he not die of some complaint of the lungs? That was what was always given out in the newspapers and accepted by all the world as historic truth."

"Well, it was a lie!" was the reply. "The Duke of Reichstadt was poisoned by order of Metternich. I can prove it to you. I am positively certain of it. It was said that the son of Napoleon, weakened by his own excesses, had been carried off by consumption, from which he

had long been suffering. The truth is very different.

"Metternich was afraid of him. Although he had done all he could to crush the spirit and the heart of the unfortunate young man, he saw the wings of the eaglet beginning to sprout. In spite of the hard-hearted diplomatist General Marmot, who had taken refuge in Vienna, he got permission in 1830 to teach the history of the Empire of Napoleon to the Duke of Reichstadt, who seemed dazzled by it. Francis I, Emperor of Austria, and grandfather of Napoleon II, animated by some little affection for his grandson, did not wish him to vegetate for ever in the seclusion of the Imperial palace, and gave leave for him to be trained for the military profession, for which the boy at once showed the greatest enthusiasm.

"Hitherto Metternich had pursued the policy of keeping the Duke of Reichstadt in reserve as a kind of bugbear whom he could turn to account if necessary against Louis Philippe. If the latter had not given him all the guarantees he demanded for a good understanding with Austria, he would have threatened him with a Napoleonic restoration.

"The Court of Vienna and the French monarchy having come to an understanding, the son of Napoleon was no longer a factor in diplo-

matic calculations, and the sudden arousing of his spirit might menace the peace of Europe, so Metternich decided on his death. It was the Grand Duchess Stephania of Baden, cousin of Napoleon I, who told me of the crime.

"She had a lady's-maid of whom she was very fond, and to whom, on the eve of her marriage, she gave a large dowry as a token of her affection. The former lady's-maid became the wife of a noted Austrian dentist, and not long afterwards she was taken dangerously ill. On her death-bed she sent to ask the Grand Duchess Stephania to come and see her, as she had something very important to confide to her.

"When her former mistress stood beside her bed the dying woman said to her—

"'You will no doubt be interested in learning the truth about the death of the Duke of Reichstadt, as he belonged to your family, and you will probably feel very differently with regard to certain persons when I have told you what I know.

"'It was my husband who killed the son of the Empress Maria Louisa. He was dentist to the young Duke, and one day Prince Metternich sent for him and saw him without witnesses. He asked him if he could put the son of Napoleon slowly to death, in the course of a year or less, by injecting poison in small doses into his

gums. Death would thus appear to be the result of decline. The Prince promised to enrich him if he consented.

"'My husband agreed to the horrible bargain, and carried out his part of it. This is the confession I wished to make to you. I know I am dying, and longed to relieve my conscience of a secret which has filled me with greatest horror.'

"The Grand Duchess Stephania is a very truthful woman, and I cannot doubt what she told me."

As I am telling of my relations with various members of the Bonaparte family I will now recall my memories of another of them, the unfortunate Prince Camerata.

He was the son of the Princess Bacciochi, an Italian lady of high rank, who owned a palace at Bologna. I had met young Camerata at the house of Prince Napoleon, who was under great obligations to the Princess, for about 1847, when he was still very poor and was living in modest rooms in the Rue d'Alger for which he only paid two thousand francs a year, she made him an allowance which helped him to live.

Prince Camerata was very much attached to me and I reciprocated his feelings. I remember that whenever he went to Bologna he never failed to bring me some Italian sausage. You may

laugh if you like, but it is such little spontaneous attentions as these which prove true friendship.

Prince Camerata was a charming fellow, warm hearted and very clever. When Napoleon III made him a member of the *Conseil d'État* he distinguished himself greatly by his readiness and intelligence.

We used to confide in each other sometimes, and one day he said to me—

"You are too friendly with the Bonapartes, or at least with one of them. Take care, my family has a way of making martyrs of those who are attached to them. They are faithful to nobody. And after all, what are we? Bohemians, always on the move, now beggars, now princes, emperors, exiles. We tramp along all the roads of Europe, here to-day, gone to-morrow. We are vagabonds by nature, and our characters are in harmony with our lives. We are egotistical and hard-hearted. The abrupt vicissitudes of fortune to which we have been subjected have made us savage and reckless."

"You are libelling yourself," I remonstrated. "You yourself, for instance, have a very tender heart."

"Your high opinion of me is too flattering for me to care to contradict you," was the reply, "but in one respect I do differ from the rest of my family. I shall pity the girl I fall in love with,

for, though I would gladly give her my whole heart, I know very well that the evil fate of the Bonapartes will bring suffering to her in spite of all the resistance I can offer. I am quite sure that the poor girl will be drawn into the vortex of suffering."

I only laughed then at his melancholy predictions, but they were after all too well founded.

He was in love with a little actress called Marthe with whom I had acted at the Gymnase, and who was really very fascinating although her face was rather pitted from smallpox and her irregular features and thin figure were certainly not in the style of a Greek Venus. But charm, as you know well, does not really consist in beauty of form only, but in natural expression, undulating grace and a certain indefinable magnetism.

Camerata could not tear himself away from her, and loved her so passionately that he wished to marry her. He actually ventured to confide in his mother, who met his confession with cries of dismay.

"What, a Prince wish to take a ballet girl as a wife!"

She at once hastened to Napoleon III and begged him to defend the honour of the family. It was agreed that not only must the Prince be prevented from the marriage on which he had set his heart, he must be made to break off all

relations with the girl he loved, which could not but be prejudicial to his character. To enforce this decree the Princess Bacciochi warned her son that she would cut off his allowance until he had given up his actress.

Of course this opposition only acted as a spur to the passion of the lovers. The Prince broke openly with his family, and no longer set any bounds to his behaviour. He appeared in public with his turtle-dove, bearding the aristocratic society of the Empire.

But he had to get money somehow. So he borrowed and he gambled, and one fine day found himself with a very big deficit. He had to raise 200,000 francs before the end of the week on pain of imprisonment. I was told of this and rushed at once to see him. I tore a bottle of laudanum out of his hand and put it in my pocket.

"Why do you not apply to your people?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"They must help you in such an emergency," I said; "their own honour is at stake."

"You don't know them," was the retort, spoken with the bitterness of despair.

"But do try them, at least," I urged, and I at last persuaded him to write to his mother, the Emperor and King Jérôme.

One and all replied that they could only help him on condition that he gave up his Marthe.

I went myself to Prince Napoleon, to whom a State pension had just been allotted, but all I could get out of him was that he could not depart from the attitude taken up by his family.

I went back to Camerata and found Marthe with him. They were kissing each other, and seemed to be the very happiest couple in the world.

I told them the abortive result of my efforts, and the Prince said brightly—

"Never mind, Judith, it will be all right. Don't you worry about me."

I thought he had found some way out of his difficulties, and I left him with Marthe, feeling less uneasy.

The next morning I heard some one drumming on my door. It was Dr. Pietra Santa, the medical attendant of the Bacciochi family.

"Camerata is dead," he said.

"What!" I cried.

"He shot himself last night."

"Oh, the scoundrels! The scoundrels!" I exclaimed. "Juggling with millions as they do they have let that poor boy kill himself for want of 200,000 francs. And they think they will escape blame in the matter! A fine challenge they have given to public opinion."

I hastened to go and see Marthe, and through her sobs she said to me—

"Oh, you don't know how dreadful it is, I wanted to go and see him again and they would not let me in. I burst out crying and they dragged me down to a carriage and brought me back here by force. And that is not all. Prince Napoleon has just left me. He wanted me to give him all Camerata's letters. I refused. I told him I would willingly give back all the jewels my lover had given me. I took off my ear-rings and my rings and offered them to him in the palm of my hand—I was mad—and he pushed my hand away."

"'No, no,' he said, 'it is the letters I want.'

"'The letters are mine. I value them more than my life. They are the dearest remembrances I have of my loved one.'

"'Reasons of State require you to give them up. They might compromise the Bonaparte family. I must have them; and if you don't give them to me the police shall come and take them by force.'

"I still refused, and he went away."

Then Marthe's sobs broke out afresh, and I offered to take the letters away and hide them for her.

"No," she said; "they would guess you had them and would persecute you for them. I won't let that happen."

At last I left her ; and the next day, at about the same time as I had heard of Camerata's death, the news was brought to me that the poor little mistress had suffocated herself in the night with the help of a charcoal stove.

A fortnight afterwards I was calling on Dr. Pietra Santa, and noticing a bust of Camerata on the mantelpiece I could not help shedding a few tears.

"You weep!" said the doctor. "Well, yesterday the mother of the dead man, Princess Bacciochi, was here and noticed the bust too. You would never guess what she said. 'Oh, there is Camerata's head. I did not know you had that bust, doctor. It is like him ; but the sculptor has flattered him. He had not so much hair as that. He was balder here.'

"As she spoke she laughed lightly and tapped the top of the head in an off-hand way."

Hearing what the doctor said I remembered what poor Camerata had told me about the hard hearts of the Bonapartes.

CHAPTER XIV

François Ponsard—A humble-minded poet : *rara avis*—Ricourt, once a *garde de corps*, but now professor of elocution, goes in search of a Charlotte Corday—He takes me to Ponsard—A recitation of *Charlotte Corday*—Rachel wants to take my part away from me—An honest man.

I NOTICE that so far I have said hardly anything of the great authors of last century. The necessity of grouping together my recollections of the chief members of the Imperial Family has led me to neglect what I have to tell of the writers I knew during the same period. I made an exception with regard to Victor Hugo, because the fact of his having been exiled on December 2, 1851, led to my losing sight of him for many years.

I will now recall all I can of the other literary men in whose pieces I acted.

François Ponsard is one of those of whom I retain a very pleasant memory, for to him I owed one of my greatest successes.

He wasn't exactly handsome. He really had rather a common-looking face, and his enemies used to say he looked like a grocer. He made no attempt to assume the airs of a poet, and this

in itself was a great merit at a time when men of letters were generally far more affected even than actors and actresses, and many aspirants to the favour of the Muses gave themselves the airs of geniuses, to make up for their total want of talent.

Ponsard was rather awkward in his manners and very nervous, peculiarities rare enough at the theatre, and, I venture to say, worthy of all sympathy in a career in which, unfortunately, success is only as a rule achieved by those who have plenty of self-confidence, who know how to pull the ropes and are gifted with sharp tongues.

He had, however, very fine eyes, with a bright, earnest, and yet sweet expression, a detail which gave to his physiognomy a certain charm and distinction of its own.

The romanticists used to make great fun of him, and could not forgive him for the great success he had achieved with his *Lucrèce*, so unlike was that fine and dignified production to the fantastic caricatures which appealed to the taste of the *burgrave* class.[1]

Can it have been because of his having to bear the brunt of the strictures, to which even Victor Hugo, Dumas and Alfred de Musset were subjected, that Rachel, at the close of the

[1] For explanation of the term burgrave, *see* note, p. 130.

year 1849, refused the honour of taking the principal part in *Charlotte Corday*, the new piece that the author of *Lucrèce* was about to put on the boards of the Théâtre Français. Yet Rachel was essentially a classic actress, and ought to have been able to appreciate the sober and well-balanced style of Ponsard.

My own private opinion is that when Rachel was timidly approached by a man, evidently in love with her, and entreated by him to interpret his work, she took a kind of delight in showing off her power over him, and making him suffer. She was intoxicated by her position and enjoyed the feeling that she was indispensable, and that, like some haughty deity, she could withhold what was asked of her by a trembling mortal.

Ponsard's friends did their very utmost to persuade her to relent. "You alone," they said, "are capable of interpreting the heroine of the play ; without you it will be impossible to put *Charlotte Corday* on the stage."

She would not listen to anything that was said. She was perfectly obdurate. If a woman has any real reasons for coming to a certain determination, you may hope to make her change her attitude by discussing and refuting those reasons. But what can you do with a woman who is perfectly unreasonable ?

Now Ponsard, himself, was so wanting in enterprise, that he simply did not know what to be at in such a difficulty, but, fortunately, there were many who were sufficiently attached to him to wish to come to his aid.

Amongst those who had recognized the merits of *Lucrèce*, long before it was known to the public and had aroused the enthusiasm of others for it, was a certain Ricourt, a bit of a Bohemian, but a very intelligent, resolute fellow, who had been a *garde de corps* under the Restoration, and with his well-poised head and long brown curls, still retained in civil life the airs of a musketeer.

At one time he had tried to be an actor, and he had been engaged at some theatre, I forget which. But in the very first scene in which he appeared, he had stopped short in the middle of a speech, muttered a few words flung at him by the prompter, then after spitting on the ground in the way soldiers have, he cried : " Bother it, I can't remember any more," stuck his hands in his pockets, and went off the stage to the great astonishment of the audience.

He then took to teaching elocution, and was really very successful in that line, for he had excellent taste, and got his pupils on quickly.

One day he came to see me, with an introduction from a mutual friend.

"Recite some verses to me," he said point-blank.

I began to laugh, for the request appeared to me somewhat abrupt.

"I've got an idea," he explained, "and believe me I am most anxious to do you a good turn."

I accepted this Sibylline utterance, and repeated a bit of one of my parts.

When he had listened for a few moments, he cried.

"What idiots! What idiots!"

And when I stopped on hearing this exclamation, he said: "Go on! go on! What idiots, what idiots! don't leave off. Where could they find such a Charlotte!"

"What do you mean with your Charlotte?" I enquired.

At that, drawing a manuscript from his pocket, he laid it on the table, and said—

"Look here. Don't lose a day, an hour, a minute, before you begin to learn the part of Charlotte Corday for me."

"Is that Ponsard's play you have there? How did you get hold of it?"

"Not another word, my dear child," was the reply. "Learn the part, that's all! In a week I will come and see you again, and I'll take you to some one who will be expecting you."

"But, after that?"

"Au revoir!" and he was gone.

I always was fond of fools. They bring an element of the unexpected into life, which would be very dull without them. I did as my visitor had told me, and when he reappeared at the time he had named, I was ready.

He settled himself down in a corner of my drawing-room, and without further preamble, said—

"Go ahead!"

I recited a dozen lines.

"Admirable!" he cried, getting up. "On with your hat and shawl, and come with me, I have got a carriage below. What idiots! what idiots!" he muttered again.

He amused me very much, and I went with him to his carriage. "Whip up," he said to the coachman, and away we went, stopping very soon at a house of modest appearance. We mounted to the second storey, went into a room, and I found myself face to face with Ponsard.

"Good morning, friend," said Ricourt. "How are you?" but without waiting for an answer, he went on, "Sit down there, and listen!"

Then turning to me, he added: "Go ahead, Mademoiselle!"

The eccentric fellow was really irresistible So without a shadow of hesitation, I plunged into my part, the two men listening to me

intently. Ricourt breaking in, every now and then, with a "*Hein ! Hein !*"

Ponsard, though rather taken aback at first, now leant forward in his arm-chair, so as to lose nothing of what I said, or of my expression, as I spoke.

"Bravo !" he exclaimed, at the end of the first scene, and I was fortunate enough to please him still more with those that succeeded it. His eyes shone with delight.

When I had finished, Ricourt cried—

"Well, there's your Charlotte. What will you say to the man who found her ?"

"A thousand thanks, dear friend," was Ponsard's answer, as he got up and embraced Ricourt.

This was the best eulogy I could possibly have had.

"I don't believe even Rachel would have been so good," declared Ricourt.

"She would certainly not have been better," corrected the poet ; and he added, "We must not allow ourselves to bear malice."

Then I, in my turn, interrupted by saying : "Rachel is a splendid actress, and it would be impossible to surpass her."

"You are right," said Ponsard, as he shook my hand ; "and I honour you for those last words, as much as I admire your talent. You shall be my Charlotte."

I Interpret Charlotte Corday

Towards the end of March 1850, the play was quite ready for the stage. There was no general rehearsal then for the dramatic critics. Journalists wrote their notices after witnessing the first representation, but before the Press or the public were admitted there were one or two preliminary rehearsals before a very limited audience, consisting of a few friends of the author and of those chosen to interpret his work.

A day or two before the evening fixed for the first representation of *Charlotte Corday*, there was such a rehearsal, as I have alluded to. Ponsard was looking on from an arm-chair, and not far from him was Rachel, who seemed anxious to set him at complete defiance by assuming the *rôle* of a mere spectator of a piece written especially for her. Grouped about them were a few of their friends.

I knew, well enough, that whatever truth there was in the affection Rachel often showed for me, that she was not on this occasion animated by any benevolent intentions towards me.

I did not appear in the first act. The play opened with a gathering at Madame Roland's, where the Girondists Buzot, Pétion, Barbaroux, Guadet and others indignantly repulsed Danton who, still reeking with the blood shed in September, had tried to join them.

When this act was over, and I was about

to appear, my fellow-actors told me that Rachel was evidently in a bad temper, and was gazing straight before her with eyes fixed, and a stern expression of resolution. There could be no doubt that she was preparing for my advent.

Well, if she expected me to fail it wasn't very wise of her to betray so openly her desire that I should. Her attitude spurred my efforts, I called up all my resolution, feeling that I owed it to my own self-respect to surpass myself with her looking on.

The second act was the most poetic of the whole play. It opened with an idyllic scene in which, wearing a light summer costume, I represented the haymakers in a field near Caen. Presently arrived several of the leading Girondists who were fleeing from the wrath of the Montagnards, as the ultra-revolutionists were called, especially from that of Danton. They asked me the way to the town, telling me who they were, and I confided to them how full of admiration I was for their patriotic devotion. Already the noble and exalted character of the heroine, in whose veins ran a little of the blood of the great Corneille, was shadowed forth.

All this greatly impressed the few spectators, who applauded vigorously, Rachel herself, after a moment's hesitation, clapping her hands, though she really must have been furious.

The succeeding scenes gradually added to the emotion produced: as each one followed the last the success of the piece became more and more assured, and when at last the climax was reached and I stabbed Marat in his bath, there was a burst of enthusiastic acclamations.

Every single point of Ponsard's composition had told. The faces of his friends radiated forth their delight, and all hands were stretched out to clasp his in congratulation.

Then occurred an unexpected and truly incredible incident, of which Ponsard himself told me afterwards. Rachel got up and, slowly approaching him, said in the most natural manner possible—

"That part of Charlotte Corday pleases me immensely. I am ready to take it whenever you like. You have only to put off the date of the first representation for a few days."

Ponsard was so dumfounded that he could not get out a word, and Rachel marched off with the air of a queen, never doubting but that he would very soon let her know that he gladly accepted her offer.

The authors who were pressing round the poet, after sharing his surprise for a moment, all advised him to accept the offer made by the great tragic actress. They admitted that I had interpreted the part well, and that no one could

wish for anything better as far as that went, but Rachel was Rachel, and, even if she was inferior to me in this particular *rôle*, the prejudice in her favour would be a far greater guarantee of success than the appearance of my name in the play-bills could possibly be.

Ponsard heard them without paying any attention to what they were saying. He was still quite overwhelmed with astonishment at what had occurred, but all of a sudden he put a stop to what his friends were urging by crying—

"No! no! no! no! a hundred times no! Rachel will not take a part in my play. If I did not tell her so to her face at once it was because she gave me no time to think. It was surprise that struck me dumb.

"I know, of course, that Rachel would draw all Paris, all France, to see my *Charlotte Corday*. But whatever I may lose by not agreeing to her suggestion, I shall remain an honest man. I engaged Judith, I was glad enough to get her when Rachel refused her collaboration, and I should be the most ungrateful fellow in the world if I took her part from her. I don't think much of you for imagining that I could do such a mean thing."

As he spoke I came from behind the scenes and went up to him. He sprang up and came to meet me, holding out his hands, and crying,

as he embraced me affectionately in the French fashion—

"Bravo, *mon enfant !*"

His was a noble nature. Men such as he are rare, even amongst poets. I was going to say *especially* amongst poets, but I checked myself.

The first representation of *Charlotte Corday* did not disappoint the expectations formed at this last rehearsal. It was a triumphal success.

As it was a time of great political excitement, it was feared that the representation of those who had taken a prominent share in the Revolution might invoke hostile demonstrations at the theatre, so the Government had troops with fixed bayonets stationed in the wings and passages behind the scenes, and we passed between their ranks on our way to and from the stage. The brave fellows were to defend us against possible violence on the part of the audience, but everything remained calm, and the only noise made was that of the thunderous acclamations of applause which, I must add, were aroused by my fellow-actors at least as much as by myself. Geffroy, especially, made a splendid Marat, I mean a hideously splendid one ; and when he appeared a groan of terror was uttered by all the spectators, so frightful and horrible was he.

Bignon, too, who took the part of Danton,

won a great deal of applause. He himself realized that he had acted well, and one day said at a gathering of artists and theatre goers, " I think I got into the very skin of the fellow." An expression which later became the rage, but was employed for the first time by Bignon on the occasion referred to.

CHAPTER XV

Alexander Dumas the elder, or joviality maketh man—A kick responded to by a bow—Dumas' uninvited guests—The whole population of San Domingo arrives at the house of the author of *Les trois Mousquetaires*—How the latter deputed two bears to do the honours for him—Alexander Dumas as a head cook—Théophile Gautier offers to be his scullion.

I HAD known Alexander Dumas the elder almost from my first *début* at the theatre. I really do not remember when I first became acquainted with him. When he took a fancy to any one he very soon gave his friendship. He would address you as *tu*, kiss you, and take you to dine with his friends. He lived in a whirl, a vortex of excitement, but of happy and gay excitement, of enthusiastic devotion for those he loved, creating about him, in a word, an atmosphere of beneficial activity. Rack my memory as I will, I cannot recall the time when he was a stranger ; he seems to have been my friend always.

All through my career Alexander Dumas has seemed to me a familiar deity of the theatre, a symbolic personality who embodied the very essence of the dramatic spirit, the humorous

happy-go-lucky side of our profession, the somewhat vulgar sensuality of the amusements in which dramatic authors and actors delight, the artistic delirium which occasionally seizes us, the ever present element of uncertainty in our existence, and the mad gambling which lends constant excitement to our lives.

This giant of a mulatto, with his big black mocking eyes, his wide nostrils, thick lips, heavy chin, his crisply curling hair, and his forehead, with its strange bumps, like that of some unruly child who is always fighting with his comrades, was truly a representative personage, a type reflecting all the passion of the romanticists. There would have been something wanting to his time if this grandson of a negress had not been seen striding along the Parisian boulevards, if his laugh had not been heard on the terraces of the cafés, or if he had not appeared playing his part with naïve self-satisfaction in official ceremonies and at the Tuileries balls, or walking about behind the scenes at the theatre with his arm round the waist of some actress, or eating and drinking enough for four in the merry suppers at which authors and artists used to meet.

There was not another man so celebrated in France, no, nor in the whole world. Passers-by used to point him out to each other admiringly, and the sight of him always called up a happy

smile. His popularity was simply unequalled. There was a story current in my time of a singular wager made by Méry of Marseilles. Walking one day in some public garden with a friend, he suddenly said to him—

"Do you see that big, ridiculous-looking fellow? I bet you a hundred sous that if I kick him, no matter where, instead of flying into a rage, he will make me a polite bow."

The bet was taken, and Méry, creeping stealthily up behind Monsieur Prud'homme,[1] gave him a tremendous kick in the small of his back. The man turned red with indignation, but Méry cried—

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I took you for Alexander Dumas, with whom I have an account to settle."

His victim, only too proud to be taken for such a great man, at once relented, and, taking off his hat in the most amiable manner, he said, with a bow—

"There is no harm done, Monsieur."

The hundred sous were won!

I have already described one dinner given by Dumas, at which Victor Hugo was present. I remember another evening, when the author of *Hernani* was present as the guest of the author of

[1] Monsieur Prud'homme is the type of a consequential upstart, as interpreted by Henri Monnier in his *Mémoires de Joseph Prud'homme*, published in 1857.—TRANS.

Antony. Seated in the corner of the salon there was a fellow who held a note-book on his knee, and was scribbling in it in feverish haste. I was so surprised at the way he was behaving that I asked Dumas who he was.

"I don't know," was the indifferent reply of my host.

A minute later Hugo Victor came up and asked the same question.

"Oh, it's probably some journalist taking notes of my party," said Alexander Dumas.

"What!" cried Hugo, "you don't know his name?"

"My dear friend, upon my word I don't. It's the first time I have noticed him," answered Dumas. "I expect he saw from the road that my rooms were lit up, and came in the hope of getting some fun here, or perhaps collecting some interesting information. I am not a bit surprised. That's the way I am treated. I am known to be very hospitable. But if his being here worries you, we will ask him to go."

"No, no, quite the contrary, he amuses me."

As for me, on the other hand, the man's way of going on annoyed me. So I went near to him, and, as if by accident, I managed to knock his note-book off his knee, by dragging my skirt against it, exclaiming as I did so, "I beg your pardon." Then pretending to be surprised I went on—

"I see, sir, that you are jotting down your impressions in that book. Don't forget to put that the strangest peculiarity of the gatherings in the house of the famous Dumas is that you sometimes meet uninvited guests there."

He coloured, and the next minute made his way to the door.

I relate this anecdote because it illustrates the free and easy ways of this amphitryon, who did not even know who all his guests were, and is an instance of his extreme kind-heartedness. Parasites presuming on an absolutely chimerical friendship would often quarter themselves on him in a shameless manner, taking their meals, or even sometimes sleeping in his house, until it pleased them to go elsewhere, for the giant was either too weak or too indifferent ever to turn them out himself.

On one occasion however even his forbearance was exhausted. He, himself, told me how this came about, and the story was such a comic one that I suspect him of having embellished it a bit. However that may be, I leave you to unravel facts from imagination.

One day Dumas went out to take a manuscript to the *Constitutionnel*, and at about eight o'clock in the evening he returned home with two friends he had met and whom he had asked to dine with him. When he got into the hall, what was his

surprise to hear talking and laughing proceeding from the dining-room, as if there were a gay and riotous party there.

He asked his servant what it all meant, and the man replied that some of his master's relations had arrived, and as he was not at home they had sat down to table without ceremony.

"Relations," growled Dumas, "I didn't know I had any in France."

"They said they did not live here, but that they came from the Island," explained the man.

"What island! Don't talk such rubbish!" exclaimed Dumas, and he himself went and flung open the dining-room door, revealing, seated round the snow-white cloth, a party of negroes as black as you can imagine. Some were very old fellows with yellowish woolly hair, others quite young and so small that their heads scarcely appeared above the edge of the table, who looked like marmosets; yet others in the prime of life, big, burly niggers with fat, shining cheeks, and women wearing gaudy, many-coloured or red, green, yellow, and blue silk scarves wound about their greasy locks, who when they laughed opened their huge mouths from ear to ear, their thick bright red lips pouting beneath their broad flat noses. Amongst the general blackness the white of the eyes gleamed conspicuously as did

that of the rows of ivory teeth busily engaged in masticating.

When Alexander Dumas appeared on the scene, he was received with a frenzy of acclamations that resembled war-cries, and in the twinkling of an eye, the famous novelist found himself surrounded, besieged, and all but crushed by a swarm of black men and women, whilst the children clung about his legs, his arms, his shoulders. The men hugged him in their arms, the women caught hold of his clothes and seemed ready to devour his hands with their greedy kisses. And through it all rose, repeated cries of "Cousin! Cousin! good morning cousin. Cousin Lixandre! Cousin Dimas! We've come from San Domingo to see our dear cousin. We all very pleased to see our cousin."

Then some of the elder ones tried to explain what relationship they bore to the great writer.

"I," said one, "am the nephew of your grandmother, who made the Marquis de la Pailleterie so happy."

"And I," cried another, "am Polycarp, son of Anastasius," and, pointing to some of the others, he went on, "Those are my children and grandchildren. That's Ignatius, that's Serephina. There are Boniface, Annunciation, Concephon, Pulcheria and Timoleon."

They then tried to explain to Dumas how

they had come to France. An American Barnum had brought them to take part in a kind of pantomime founded on the history of Toussaint-Louverture.[1] The Yankee manager was going to make the tour of Europe with them, and they were to perform at fairs in all the towns through which they passed.

Poor Dumas scratched his head in perplexity. He did not feel any particular family affection for all these African monkeys, but what could he do? He decided, like a true philosopher, that the best thing would be to beat a retreat.

"It's all very fine," he said, "but unfortunately I cannot dine with you to-night. Eat and drink as much as you like, but I am off. Good evening."

"You are going? You won't stop with us!" cried the negroes in plaintive accents. "You really will go—well, then, we'll come and have breakfast with you to-morrow. We are all fond of our cousin. Good evening, Cousin Dimas, Cousin Lixandre. Au revoir till to-morrow!"

"Good gracious me!" growled Dumas, as he left them. "They mean to come again to-morrow. Upon my word, they take my house for an inn. I can't exactly turn them out; for,

[1] Toussaint-Louverture was the leader of the insurgents of San Domingo from 1796–1802. He was taken prisoner at the latter date by General Brunet, and died in the fortress of Joux in 1803.—TRANS.

after all, there really is a distant relationship between us. The thing to do will be to disgust them, so that they will never wish to set foot within my doors again."

He turned the difficulty over and over again in his mind all the evening, and could not enjoy the society of his two friends in the least because of his pre-occupation. Strange to say, in spite of his usually fertile imagination, he was still unable to decide what to do when he got home again. The next morning he left his house at eleven o'clock to avoid the negro inroad, which he knew would take place an hour later.

Walking sadly along the boulevards, he happened to pass a travelling circus, which included a menagerie, part of the performances of which was the dancing on the boards of two big, black bears, under the direction of their tamer. Dumas stopped short, and striking his forehead with his hand, he cried—

"There's my way of escape!"

He waited till the show was over, and then went and made the owner of the wild beasts the most extraordinary proposal he had ever received, for he asked him to take the two bears to his rooms, the address of which he gave, and let them loose in the dining-room.

The payment offered for compliance was very

tempting, and the tamer having accepted it, led his two terrible beasts in leash to the house indicated to him. Great was the consternation of the *concierge* and servants when the party arrived. The keeper quickly put a stop to all opposition and remonstrance by showing the written order of the author of *Les trois Mousquetaires*, whose vagaries were too well-known to excite any surprise.

The two bears and their keeper were therefore duly installed in the dining-room, where the table with its white cloth was already set out with flowers and fruit, gleaming plate and shining glass, for it was Dumas' custom to keep open house for his friends, and he had left home without ordering any change to be made.

The negroes duly arrived, and the cousin not being there to welcome them, made their way, as they had done the evening before, straight to the dining-room. They were received with terrifying growls. Whatever could those growls mean? The little black boys and girls, who had crossed the threshold, stopped short and, turning tail, butted into their parents, who were pushing in behind them, screaming hard enough to rouse the whole quarter. The two huge monsters, sitting up on their hind legs, stared at the intruders with their little red eyes,

uttering fresh growls as they opened their great mouths full of formidable teeth.

The negroes and negresses tried to quiet the children, and gazed alternately at the two shaggy creatures and the well-garnished board, hesitating whether to advance or to retire. They would have liked to do the former, but they dared not.

Suddenly one of the two bears got up, and came on all fours to sniff at them. Then ensued an awful panic. The whole negro horde rushed precipitately out of the house, and banging the door after them, ran away yelling as if thirty-six thousand devils were pursuing them.

Dumas heard, a few hours later, of the success of his stratagem, and since then he has had no further news of his relations from San Domingo.

I really don't believe this most fortunate man ever felt more than eighteen years old. When, about 1854, I installed myself in very luxurious quarters in the Rue Galilée, he was one of the most frequent guests at my receptions, brightening them up with his imperturbable good humour.

One evening, when I had quite a large number of literary celebrities gathered round my table, including Théophile Gautier, Banville, Méry, Girardin, Roger de Beauvoir, Mario Uchard and Ponsard, we kept up the gathering

until far into the night. I had read aloud nearly the whole of the *Emaux et Camées*, the charm and grace of which delighted us all the more because that masterpiece was then in the first flush of novelty.

Time had flown, and no one had noticed how late it was till Théophile Gautier suddenly got up, and exclaimed—

"A truce to poetry, Judith! It is one o'clock in the morning, and I am simply famished. Can't you give us something substantial to eat? I don't know whether you agree with me, my friends, but as for me, I could do with a regular good appetizing meal."

At this, all my other guests looked at me in a way that showed plainly enough that they shared the outspoken Théophile's opinion. I really didn't know what to do. My servants had all gone to bed at midnight, and I hadn't the least idea how to improvise a supper. I explained the position to my friends.

"What a good job!" cried Alexander Dumas. "The cooks are all in bed. We will take their place. Come, Blanchette, show us where your larder is."

I took him to the kitchen, and Dumas himself opened all the meat-safes and cupboards, declaring that what was left over from the last meal was plenty for a regular good supper.

"Here are scrunchels, that only want a little skilful handling to make them seem like freshly-cooked dishes."

Then, continuing his researches, he came to the untouched supplies for the next day, including a hare, the discovery of which made him utter a shout of triumph. Seeing the white apron and round cap of my chef on a chair, he donned them, picked up the hare by its ears, seized a spit, and thus equipped returned to the drawing-room, where he was received with frantic acclamations of applause. The white apron and cap set off his dark complexion, and he looked for all the world like some head-cook in an old inn in posting days, when copious repasts were always ready for the travellers who arrived by coach.

"You see this noble animal," he cried, brandishing his hare. "In thirty minutes, not one more or less, this creature, roasted in accordance with the requirements of the best culinary art, will have the honour of being dished up for you, my illustrious gentlemen and stately ladies, by Alexander Dumas, your unworthy cook."

Then he called, "Théo, Méry, Beauvoir, come and help me revive the fire," and all four of them rushed to the kitchen, where they proceeded to blow up the fire, turn the spit, and roast the hare, making such an uproar that you

would have thought hell was let loose. My private opinion was that there was more noise going on than work, but Dumas had told me to keep away from them, declaring that women knew nothing about cooking.

Half-an-hour later Théophile Gautier appeared on the threshold of the drawing-room, and with the utmost gravity announced, "Supper is served, madame!"

We all went into the dining-room, in which some of us had already laid the cloth again. We were hardly seated before a solemn procession of cooks appeared, Théophile leading the way carrying a sauce-tureen, and closely followed by Dumas triumphantly upholding a dish, on which the hare, which he had replaced in its skin, was sitting upright on its haunches, holding a carrot in its forepaws.

Behind Dumas came Méry and Beauvoir, one wielding a great carving-knife, the other a huge fork.

But everybody cried, "The hare isn't cooked after all!"

Dumas responded to this with a disdainful smile. He left us to gaze admiringly on his work for a moment, and then snatching the knife and fork from Méry and Beauvoir, he cut the stitches sewing up the skin of the hare, drew the body out, and proceeded to carve it.

I owe it to truth to admit that I never ate a better roasted dish. The sauce, too—a gravy with a dash of vinegar, flavoured with chopped up herbs, was most appetizing. All my guests ate heartily, and lavished compliments on Dumas for his skill.

After the hare, the remains of the dinner were served, freshened up with mayonnaise and *sauce soubise*, most deliciously concocted, evoking as much enthusiasm as the first course.

We asked Dumas where he had learnt to cook.

"Why," was his joking reply, "are not literature and cooking twin sisters? Classic recipes or romantic recipes, haven't all writers their culinary formulæ for mixing their dishes? Don't critics say of some of our productions, that there is too much sauce in them, or that they are too diluted. Don't they admire others because of their flavour and the salt with which they are seasoned? Are not some of us often blamed for serving up *réchauffés*. It's my opinion that exactly the same qualities are needed for holding the pen or the handle of the frying-pan, and I really greatly regret that a good cook is not held in the same esteem as a good weaver of romances. As for myself, I am prouder of being able to brew a good sauce than of my power of writing a good page.

"After all," he went on, "what is literature but appetizing diet? If geniuses had not turned their backs on the kitchen because of the little glory to be won in it, what tremendous progress would have been made in a most beneficent art. If Corneille, Racine, Molière and Voltaire had applied their marvellous gifts to the invention of new dishes, what divine joys might not human gluttony have looked forward to. But, alas! the stupidity of public opinion, that looks down on cooks, has deprived poor mortals of pleasures which would have consoled them for many woes!"

"He is right," cried Théophile Gautier. "Let him take an oath to devote himself henceforth entirely to cooking. As for me, I swear to serve him as a scullion for the rest of his life."

We all laughed heartily at this conditional promise.

CHAPTER XVI

Alexander Dumas makes Isabelle Constant recite love scenes—How the suspicions of Madame Person are aroused and justified—The paternal attitude of the younger Dumas towards his father—A wager—Marguérite de Bourgogne held at arm's length—The cross of honour of Monsieur Lurine—Alexander Dumas gives a specimen of his handwriting.

If I were to relate all the anecdotes I know about Alexander Dumas I should be able to fill a volume, but I must refrain, as it is my own Memoirs, not his, I am writing.

As I have already implied, the famous writer was a great admirer of women, and as a matter of course he was extremely popular amongst them. He always had one chief mistress who was very jealous of his paying any attention to possible rivals in his affections. An author who had the power of giving parts to actors naturally attracted all the young aspirants for posts at the theatre, and even apart from his patronage the great Dumas, who was applauded in every theatre, had no difficulty in making conquests. He was a fine-looking, handsome fellow, and so fascinating in every way that it was no

wonder all the young actresses fell in love with him.

Now a certain lady named Madame Person, who for some little time had reigned supreme over the heart of this sultan, was so terribly jealous that there were often very stormy scenes between her and her lover. She used to fly at him and upbraid him furiously if she thought he was neglecting her for any one else, but she could never get him to mend his ways. He used to wait philosophically for the tempest to blow over, never saying a word, for he was a keen observer and knew full well that to answer an angry woman would only mean the fat in the fire. His vivid imagination enabled him to make quite unexpected excuses whenever he was placed in an awkward corner, and he himself told me of several tragi-comic incidents which occurred in the course of his passages of arms with Madame Person.

The lady in question used to spy on Alexander perpetually and became a perfect tigress when she discovered how fond he was growing of a young actress named Isabelle Constant. The latter was a charming girl whom Dumas had known ever since she was a child, and for whom he had long had a paternal affection. As she grew older and became a truly lovely girl, this benevolent feeling was gradually transformed

into admiration, which, when Isabelle was about eighteen, in its turn developed into love. Dumas used often to invite her to his house under a pretext of teaching her elocution and giving her professional advice, and it was not long before she quite supplanted Madame Person.

Now the latter arrogated to herself the right of going into her lover's rooms at any time, but fortunately for Dumas she used to make such a noise when she came in that he was able to prepare to receive her.

"Where's the negro?" she used to shout, for that was the flippant way in which she spoke of the famous writer.

"He is out," the well-trained servant would reply.

"Out, is he? Well then, I'll be bound he's gone a-courting. But I'll first see if you are speaking the truth."

"Excuse me, madame, but——"

"Let me pass, let me pass. I will go in."

All this racket outside of course acted as a warning to the too ardent lover, and by the time Madame Person appeared he had sent his little Isabelle out at another door.

"Of course I knew you were here," growled the intruder as she dashed in, "yet the man said you were out."

"I was hard at work and gave orders I was

not to be interrupted, but of course you are at home here."

"Oh, working were you, and what's become of your lady assistant?"

"My lady assistant? What do you mean?"

"Oh, yes, yes; pretend to be surprised. But I'll catch you yet. You won't be able to throw dust in my eyes always!"

This sort of thing taught Madame Person that she must steal quietly upon Alexander if she wished to surprise him off guard, so the next time she had her suspicions that he was not alone she opened the door of his study suddenly, to find him kneeling at the feet of Isabelle Constant.

"Ah, I have caught you at last!" she shrieked.

"What do you mean, dear friend?" asked Alexander with the most innocent air in the world. And detaining Isabelle, who was about to run away, he said to her: "Go on, my child, let's finish this scene." Then turning to Madame Person he went on, "I was just going through a scene of the fourth act of the *Demoiselles de Saint Cyr* with this child. I was taking the part of Roger and she that of Charlotte de Mérian. I was saying to her—'Oh, let me ask your pardon on my knees!' You'll remember how it goes. 'Now the king is coming, I await him, I defy him! I am loved! I am loved!'"

Madame Person was over-reached for the time, and grumbled out—

"Oh, very well, but you can finish the lesson another day. Au revoir, Mademoiselle!"

Lovers, however, are proverbially imprudent, and a few days later she caught her Alexander with Isabelle in his arms and naturally stormed at him afresh, but he was not a bit disconcerted, merely telling her they were reciting a scene from his *Antony*.

"'No, I will not leave thee. I will take all the blame, and the punishment of God shall fall on me alone. Yes, we will yet be happy . . . only be calm.'" Here he went on addressing Isabelle, "I take you in my arms, and you cry, 'I am happy!'"

"'I am happy!'" echoed Isabelle with conviction.

"That's more than I am," retorted poor Madame Person, although even she could not help laughing. "And I don't approve of your way of going on at all."

At the time of which I am writing, that is to say about 1854–55, there was also something very amusing about the relations between the two Dumas, father and son. They were both at the very zenith of their fame, for you will remember that the *Dame aux Camélias* had been the rage since 1852, when it was dramatized.

The two were devotedly attached to each other, but the remarkable thing about their friendship was that the son was inspired by paternal and the father by filial sentiments.

Dumas the younger had come to maturity very early, and though he was always in good spirits he had himself well under control, whilst his father remained to the end a regular scapegrace.

"My father is a big child, who was born to me when I was quite small," Alexander the second used to say humorously and truthfully, for the incorrigible runner after petticoats would tell the author of his being all his love adventures, and the son would gently take him to task, representing to him that he was damaging his reputation, that he would never be made a member of the Academy if he went on as he was doing, and that however hard he worked he could never keep pace with the mountain of his debts.

"You are right, my dear Alexander," the father would reply. "I vow and declare to you that from next Monday my conduct shall be exemplary. But just now I've got a little idyll on foot which I really must carry through to the end. And in this connection a little money would come in very handily. Haven't you got twenty-five louis to lend me?"

The younger Dumas would produce the money without much persuasion, and as might be expected "little idylls" constantly succeeded each other, ever putting off the great Monday which was to inaugurate a new era in the life of the father. One day the son received from a jeweller some beautiful diamond earrings addressed to Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, and accompanied with a receipted invoice. He was not expecting any parcel of the kind, and guessed at once that his address had been mistaken for that of his father. It was very evident that the latter had ordered the jewels, and knowing that he had a reputation for being a bad hand at paying, he had settled the account in advance to make sure of getting them.

"What a man!" murmured the son, "earrings costing four thousand francs, and his servants waiting for their wages!" and he thereupon locked up the earrings in his desk.

The next morning his father rushed in upon him, crying—

"Did you get some earrings addressed to me yesterday, Alexander?"

"Earrings?"

"Yes; the jeweller tells me he sent them to you by mistake. They ought to have come to me."

"My dear father," was the reply, delivered

with great solemnity, "I should be sorry to tell you a lie. It is true that I received some earrings."

"Give them to me then."

"I no longer have them."

"You have not got them still!"

"I knew what an indulgent father you are, and perhaps I have not behaved very well in the matter, but when the jewels came to me yesterday I was very hard up for money, so I sold your earrings."

"You wretch!"

"I thought you would have approved of what I have done."

"That's really too much! Approved of your robbing me!"

"I said to myself, 'it's easy to see that my father has just made a lot of money if he can pay for jewellery for women. He is evidently not in want of anything for himself, so I can turn these diamonds into money without doing him any harm.'"

"Alexander, Alexander!" exclaimed the elder Dumas, "I have always warned you that your passion for play would be your ruin. You really pain me very much. Talent is not everything, you want principle as well."

"Yes, father, I know," replied Alexander the second in a wheedling tone. "Principle's the thing."

"I believe you are only making fun of me, you scamp," was the angry retort. "I'm off, and I'll have nothing more to do with you," and with that he flung out of the room banging the door after him.

All the same he re-appeared a week later and said to his son in a piteous voice—

"Come now, dear boy, you must have been able to replenish the exchequer since last week, for the *Dame aux Camélias* is being acted in every theatre in France. Can't you let me have a little money. Oh, if only I had what I paid for those earrings a few days ago!"

The younger Dumas phlegmatically opened the drawer of his desk, and taking out the earrings gave them to his father with a smile.

"Here are your earrings. Now you can sell them again. I just kept them till you really wanted them. Principle's the thing."

"You good for nothing rogue," cried Dumas the elder, embracing his son. "Do you think it's seemly for a son to teach his father how to behave?"

"Oh, dear dad," was the reply, "a good heart makes up for everything."

It was from Alexander the younger that I heard this charming story, which is certainly well worth preserving.

I think I must now tell you about the herculean strength of Dumas the elder. One marvellous feat I myself saw him perform will be enough to give you an idea of it.

During the Second Empire there was an actress named Mademoiselle Lagier who was six feet high, measured fifty-eight inches round the waist, and weighed over twelve stone.

She was taking the part of Marguérite de Bourgogne in the *Tour de Nesle*, and one day when she took off her mask that her dying victim might see her face, the actor who was representing Philippe d'Aulnay, taken aback probably by the huge bulk of the lady, involuntarily exclaimed instead of Marguérite de Bourgogne Queen of France, *La Tour de Nesle*, which provoked a roar of laughter from the audience.

Well, to come to the point, one evening Dumas was at a reception at which Mademoiselle Lagier was also a guest, and the famous novelist was boasting of his strength when somebody remarked quietly—

"I bet you a louis, my dear Dumas, that you cannot hold up Mademoiselle Lagier at arm's length."

"Done," cried Dumas, "if she will consent to the experiment. I undertake to hold her up at arm's length for twenty seconds."

The big woman got up and planted herself before him, laughing good-humouredly.

Dumas looked at her for a minute, pretended to massage both his biceps, and then planting himself firmly on the ground he emitted a deep heave ho ! and raised up the massive actress.

One of the spectators counted the seconds, otherwise every one looked on silently. Dumas held his breath and the veins on his temples swelled almost to bursting point. "Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two !" He held out to twenty-five, then giving a tremendous sigh of relief, he put down the awful weight and was greeted with furious applause.

He looked round on the assembled company triumphantly and remarked—

"Really if literature should fail to bring me in enough, I think I might make a very honest living if I were to don pink tights and tiger skin breeches, and go and lift weights in places of public resort."

Wrestler, cook, novelist and dramatist ! He had indeed a good many strings to his bow !

As for his wit, there is no need to quote specimens of it, for many of his sallies have already been recorded by his biographers. Here, however, are two or three of his jokes which still make me laugh when I recall them.

One day I saw him climb on to a post-office van and heard him say to the driver, "I too am a man of letters," to which the coachman who recognized him retorted, "That's true enough, Monsieur Dumas!"

Another time when he was with me we were talking about some literary men who had recently been decorated, amongst whom was a certain Lurine who had written a second-rate play called *La Comédie à Ferney*.

"Can you tell me, by the way," I asked Dumas, "why the cross was given to Lurine?"

"He promised never to eat asparagus again," was the reply.

Just one more joke, rather a cruel one this time.

There was a certain lady, well known in society for the way she used to boast of the laurels her husband had won, who invited Alexander Dumas to one of her receptions. Never, he told me, had he been so much bored as he was on this occasion. He had been asked to come just that he might amuse the company with his repartees, and when he found this out, as was to be expected, he would not open his lips.

His hostess, however, was determined, as he was there, to get something out of him, so she begged him to write a few lines in her album.

"I should be so delighted," she said, "to have a souvenir of a man who writes so well!"

Then Dumas, pretending to think that it was his fine handwriting she admired, took a pen and after licking his lips like a schoolboy who is going to do his very best, he slowly wrote—

"Ba, bé, bi, bo, bu, ca, cé, ci." Then leaving a space for the rest of the alphabet, he added the following sentence—

"It does not do to talk of a rope in the house of a man who has been hung."

After this he took leave of his hostess, who made no attempt to detain him.

CHAPTER XVII

Two plays by Alfred de Musset, in which I took parts : the *Caprice* and *Louison*—The author of the *Nuits* comes to read the *Caprice* with me—De Musset's evil genius—A discussion on love—An alarming hallucination—The original manners of a gentleman.

I MAY claim to have created parts in two of Alfred de Musset's plays. I took that of Mathilde in the *Caprice*, which was acted at the Théâtre Français on September 24, 1847, and that of the Duchess in *Louison*, which appeared on the same stage on February 23, 1843.

The *Caprice* had been written by De Musset ten years before, which accounts for the youthful grace that distinguishes it, and for the fact that it simply vibrates with tender emotion, its author not having yet been overtaken, as he was a little later, by premature old age. *Louison*, on the other hand, which was composed just before it was put on the stage, betrays the exhaustion of the brain from which it proceeded. It is not exactly an unsatisfactory play, but it is laboured and the plot is cold and tame, altogether wanting in the spirit and delicate spontaneity that are the chief distinctions of De Musset's other dramatic

works. If it had been written by any one else it might have been considered a pleasing piece enough, but it is the worst of all its author's productions.

The *Caprice* came to us from St. Petersburg, and was brought to Paris by Madame Allan, an excellent actress, who had acted in the Imperial Theatre of Prussia, winning immense applause in the part of Madame de Léry. Musset's bright little comedies were already very much appreciated in France, the *Caprice* as well as all the rest of them, but no one had dreamt that the exquisite little fantasias so charming to read would stand the glare of the footlights.

Madame Allan, however, fortified by her own experience, insisted upon the Comédie Française following the example of the St. Petersburg theatre. So the *Caprice* was put on the stage, as were also most of Musset's other fanciful pieces, and nearly all were well received. This just shows how difficult it is to judge beforehand what will succeed on the boards, and also what bad policy it is for managers to refuse, as they generally do, plays that seem to them too delicate and artistic to take with the public.

Soon after the rehearsal of the *Caprice* began, De Musset came to me one evening to read my part over with me and to coach me in the expression I ought to put into it.

I was very proud to receive him. It was the first time I was brought into personal relations with him and came face to face with him. Shall I confess it? The impression he made on me was a very ambiguous one, for good and bad were strangely blended, or rather conflicted, in his nature. He was but thirty-seven years old then, but he looked nearly sixty, so flabby were his features and so dull his eyes, so muddy was his complexion, so *blasé* his expression and so languid his walk. His constitution was already undermined by the dissipation and over-indulgence in drink which were to cut short his career ten years later. I don't know if he was ever good-looking. Certain portraits of him represent him as a handsome fellow, but all I can say is that at the time I am speaking of he was very ugly, and a good deal of courage would be needed by the woman who should accept the homage of the great poet of love.

Looking at the wreck before me I found it difficult to believe in his romantic relations with George Sand. It is true that when a little later I had an opportunity of seeing the latter close to I was just as much struck with the ugliness of that masculine-looking creature. It occurred to me that the portraits of them when they were young were frauds, and that both of them had profited by the impression their reputations had made on

the artists to whom they posed. It really seemed to me that it was only their celebrity which had idealized the vulgar commonplace intrigue of which they were the hero and heroine, and I pondered on the omnipotence of poetry and romance that can thus transform in the imagination of the public, the lives and even the faces of those who know only too well how to keep up the fiction.

Looking at this nightmare of a De Musset, I also realized the terrible vengeance with which nature pursues those who abuse the joys she gives. The man, who for all time will be looked upon as the type of sensual voluptuousness and of frenzied passion, was there before my eyes, with trembling hands, slobbering mouth, teeth chattering with intermittent fever, his whole body distorted and bent, and every now and then shaken with convulsive tremors. Hideous phantom of the triumphant victor of days gone by. I assure you I am not exaggerating in the least.

Before beginning to read, De Musset asked me to give him something to drink. I pointed to the bottle of beer I had had put on the table for him.

"Beer!" he cried; "Pooh! I don't actually dislike it, but I think it is too insipid."

"Would you like me to get you some rum?"

"Mademoiselle," he replied with some im-

patience. "I beg you to excuse my weakness, but it is so well known that it is useless for me to try to conceal it. It is absinthe that I crave for," and he added, "I simply must have it. I depend on it to give clearness to my ideas."

So I sent for a bottle of absinthe for him. He then half filled his glass with beer, and added absinthe up to the brim, an extraordinary mixture, the mere sight of which made me feel quite sick.

He drank and read, and as he drank his utterance became more animated and less feeble. There was still something charming about his elocution. Poets nearly always read better than actors, because they are more intellectual. It would have been delightful to listen to De Musset if the chattering of his teeth and his gasps for breath had not interrupted his reading every now and then.

He asked me to recite several passages of which he gave me the catch-word, and he seemed satisfied with me.

"Mathilde," he remarked, "seems to me a happy creature. She is tender-hearted, and silently endures the loneliness in which she is left by her husband. She doesn't burst out into violent recriminations. She is pathetic in her grief. You will interpret her well, as you are an amorous woman yourself."

I don't quite know what came over me then, but I answered him—

"Upon my word, if you think I am an amorous woman you are very much mistaken. I have always kept the mastery over my own heart, and all I care for is my profession. I consider love-making a perfectly ridiculous occupation."

At that my hearer suddenly became violently excited.

"Wretched woman!" he cried, "to speak slightingly of love! Do you realize what you have said? Love is the only aim of existence. To love is to be the equal of the gods. To love is to do away with the limitations imposed by the flesh on the spirit. It is to leave self behind and live in another, and to inaugurate here below the future course of souls. Oh, can you not see that when two lovers are together and all their feelings mingle and all their thoughts are one, a sublime miracle is accomplished. Whence comes the intoxication of love? Do you think it is but the delirium of the senses? It is when a man loves that he rises above his perishable nature. If there be anything immortal in us it is our love. It is a force that makes us feel superior to death. And when death divides a pair of lovers, does the survivor doubt for one instant that the separation is but momentary?

To him there can be no uncertainty, because he knows well that a flame so ardent, so pure, so immaterial can never be extinguished. Yes, true lovers surely meet again beyond the stars in the divine infinity. Only by right of having loved on earth can any soul aspire to triumph over death. To love is the true prayer, the only religion of man, to love is to conquer eternity."

I began to smile in a sceptical manner, and he went on again angrily—

"Jewess! Jewess! I was mistaken when I said you were amorous. You cannot understand love because you are not a Christian. You have never heard the word commanding us to love, of the God who out of love for us died on the Cross."

I recognized in what he was saying now the strange mysticism which in all De Musset's poetry is mingled with the descriptions of sensual joys, the yearning after faith in the divine; I understood his anathemas of Voltaire, and was reminded of the quaint theory which identifies earthly with heavenly love.

A little piqued by the tirade he had just addressed to me I said to De Musset—

"It's true I am a Jewess, but for all that I know all about Christianity" (I might have told him of the Catechism prize that I had deserved, but did not get!). "I greatly admire the self-denial that sanctifies that religion. But what

connection is there between the beauty of self-sacrifice and the purely animal passions of certain lovers, their quarrels, their unbridled tempers, their treachery and their meannesses ! You degrade Christianity by comparing it to sensual pleasures."

"I entreat you," he replied in a solemn voice, "do not blaspheme love. Even in the least noble passions there are moments when lovers forget themselves and really give themselves to each other, when they are truly sincere in swearing eternal fidelity and such moments are like the stars of heaven in the darkness of the night. That after such moments they should lie to each other, deceive and torment each other, is heartrending, no doubt, but for all that there was something ideal in their embraces. And is not even suffering good for the soul ? Is it not through suffering that it is raised to a higher level ? When a lover, though he feels he has not deserved the pain inflicted on him, yet forgives it, even rejoicing in the agony and still loving on, does he not resemble the divine Sufferer on the Cross ? "

He said all this with an exaltation with which absinthe had something to do, for all the time he kept on filling up his glass, but now and then he seemed to be speaking from the very bottom of his heart.

"You have evidently suffered a good deal yourself, Monsieur de Musset," I remarked.

"Ah, yes! ah, yes!" he cried, adding with almost childish petulance, "oh, those wretched women, they have fleeced me like anything. They don't know what generosity means. They hardly ever really love, and though they are supposed to abandon themselves to their lovers they take pretty good care of themselves. They know so well how to simulate tenderness that they take you in easily, and you feel you could die for them. You confide in them with the simple faith of a little child, and it is just at that very moment that they are thinking of the kisses of some one else. Our heart of flesh bleeds from friction with their heart of stone." And he went on repeating, "Oh, the wretches!"

Then he added: "As for me, I regret nothing. I at least have loved. What does it matter what they were to me. They gave me the chance of loving and of suffering; yes, of suffering. Scarcely recovered from the wounds inflicted by one, I abandoned myself to another with the same confiding frankness, only to be as cruelly treated by her as by her predecessor. But for all that I have never lost faith in love. Love has broken, annihilated me, compelled me to seek in unhealthy excitement forgetfulness of my woes, yet I have never

ceased to believe in it. I still think the gift of the heart the very noblest thing in all the world. Neither have my trials been altogether in vain, for I have sung of them, and never is the Muse of poetry more beautiful than when her eyes are full of tears!"

"True," I observed, "your verses are sublime, but you have paid dearly for them."

"You can never pay too dearly for art, my child," was the reply. "Shame upon the timid author who is afraid to live and economizes in experience. He celebrates the joys and tortures of the heart without having ever felt them. I, on the other hand, have regally lavished my life for the sake of giving pleasure to my fellow creatures. I think they will always retain a feeling of gratitude for me!"

As he uttered the last words he became as it were transfigured. His face shone with enthusiasm. I gazed in silent admiration at the great poet, the commanding spirit who had voluntarily set his own palace on fire to provide a fine spectacle for other men. Alas! this outburst of fiery genius was succeeded almost immediately by a kind of morbid paroxysm.

De Musset never ceased to drink, and suddenly he flung his glass against the table and broke it to pieces, gazing the while fixedly at the vacant space in front of him as if he

discerned a human form in it. I was terrified, and he himself seemed afraid.

"Do you not see him?" he asked me.

"Whom?"

He turned and looked at me, and began to laugh.

"I thought I saw some one there. It was the result of my overstrained nerves. I sometimes have terrible hallucinations. A minute ago I thought I saw myself on the other side of the table. That's an illusion I often have, and though I am in a way prepared for it the impression is always so strong, so vivid that I can never help trembling. It's a sort of spectre I see; it's me, but an older man than I am, with livid face and sunken eyes, looking as if I were dying . . . I thought I was touching glasses with him and that mine broke. I beg your pardon——"

Then I heard a kind of rattle in his throat, and he said to me—

"I am very cold, I feel as if frozen blood were mounting from my legs to my heart."

His teeth chattered, and I went to fetch a wrap and helped him to lie down on the sofa. I felt very anxious and very much embarrassed. The time had flown quickly as we talked and he drank absinthe. It was now nearly two o'clock in the morning, and I had told my maid she could go to bed.

I wrapped up the poor, great poet as well as I could. He did not speak for some time, but presently he told me he felt better and that the crisis was over. A little later he asked me if he might spend the night on my sofa, for he really did not feel he had the strength to go and get a carriage. He would leave, he added, the first thing in the morning.

Humanity compelled me to accede to this request, which I did the more readily, as the stay of this unfortunate human wreck in my house for the night could not really compromise me.

At last he fell asleep. I went to bed myself, locking my door to guard against intrusion, though I really had no fear of anything of the kind. I took the far more necessary precaution of taking away what was left of the absinthe on the table in the drawing-room.

I did not see De Musset again the next day, but my maid told me that he got up very early and went home in a cab.

I must tell you now of another characteristic of this unfortunate man of genius. A few days after the first representation of *Louison* I was at the Comédie Française, but as a spectator, not as an actress. I had on a white hat which I had been told suited me very well. From the box in which I sat I noticed Alfred de

Musset, and he caught sight of me too, so he came to see me between the acts. He planted himself in front of me, and said rudely—

"You've got a hideous hat on, Mademoiselle. I can't imagine how pretty women can dress badly. It's a crime of treason to beauty. It's sheer stupidity for any one who has a white skin like yours to go and spoil the effect of her complexion by wearing a white hat!" As he spoke he gave me a bang on the head which quite crushed my hat, turned on his heel and took himself off. His behaviour so upset me that I hadn't a word of protest ready. When I told my friend Roger de Beauvoir, who knew De Musset well, of the incident he said—

"He is rather addicted to such pleasantries. He is afflicted with a kind of sadic[1] mania for spoiling women's costumes. The other day he was at Tortoni's with La Mogador who was wearing a light green dress, when suddenly, without the slightest warning he seized a bottle of raspberry syrup and poured its contents over his companion's clothes, completely ruining her toilette."

"I see," I replied. "He has the manners of a gentleman!"

[1] This expression is derived from the name of the Marquis de Sade, a writer of books of doubtful morality.—TRANS.

CHAPTER XVIII

Full length portrait of one of the most celebrated lovers of last century—How George Sand coloured her pipes—Her want of good manners—She judges me severely—I pay her out—Nathalie takes Émile Augier to task for having a cold in his head—An amusing story about an English lord—Mario Uchard marries Madeleine Brohan—Their marriage turns out badly—Thanks to their separation, I take the part of Fiammina.

As I have been talking of *him* it is only fair that I should say something about *her*. George Sand is inseparable from Alfred de Musset. During their life the lovers of Venice lived together, separated, lived together again, and again parted from each other. Since their death they have been inextricably welded together in everybody's memory. The shade of De Musset ought to be happy for he remained fascinated to the end, but that of George Sand must be less gratified, for she ended by conceiving a perfect hatred of her former lover.

As for me, I fail to understand the passion Alfred de Musset professed for her. As I have already remarked, she was very ugly. It is true that she was forty-three years old when I saw her for the first time, but I found it difficult to

believe that such a great stout creature could ever have been pretty. Her chin was linked to her neck by three rolls of fat from which grew scattered hairs, her cheeks were flabby and drooping. I must admit, however, that she had fine black eyes, though their beauty did not make up for her common appearance as a whole. She had very slovenly habits. Her hair, which retained its brown colour, was as greasy as that of a wandering gypsy. She dressed very badly, her bodices being shabby and her cloaks threadbare. It must be admitted, however, that her personal economy was very much to her credit, for she denied herself for the sake of her children or for the poor, whose wants she liberally supplied. But whatever may have been her mental qualities, she certainly had no feminine graces in her external appearance. She was in fact like what is vulgarly called a " toby jug." And to these disadvantages were added a masculine voice, a martial gait and bold blunt manners. Nature certainly made a mistake in her case, for she ought to have been a man.

Before I met her for the first time I had conceived an ideal presentment of her. I imagined her to be like some heroine of romance such as Indiana, Valentine, Lælia, or Edmée, supple amazons, full of energy yet graceful withal, alike vigorous, sensuous and

poetic. I saw her as revealed to me in her delightful rural romances, the *Mare au Diable* and *François le Champi*, and I fancied her to be as full of dreamy charm as are her romances of Berri. I was her fervent admirer, nay more, her idolatress ; and I attributed almost superhuman qualities to her. Oh, my goodness ! What a disillusionment the reality was to be for me.

I saw her for the first time at the rehearsal of a little play she had written just after the Revolution of 1848, and which was going to be represented at the Théâtre de la République, as the Comédie Française was then called. It was very apropos at the time, and its name was *Le Roi attend* (The King waits). George Sand had written it for a popular and gratuitous entertainment, intended to inaugurate the Republican era in the national theatre of France.

It was a case very like that of *L'Impromptu de Versailles*, a comedy which Molière struggled to get finished in the all-too-short time allowed him by Louis XIV. The great writer worked out his plot at a gallop, interrupted perpetually by importunate intruders, all his actors and actresses, one after the other, who hardly knew their parts, hurrying to confide their worries to him ; toadies and busybodies and all the

rest of the genus bore, dashing in on him to tell him that the curtain must go up at once, the King was in the theatre already. He would not wait. He was waiting. He had waited, and so on.

At last driven to bay, Molière wrote in a kind of prophetic rhapsody—

"I see a king it's true, but his name is not Louis XIV. He is called the people, the sovereign people. This is a name I did not know before; a name great as eternity. That sovereign, too, is great, greater than all other kings, because he is good, because it is not to his interest to deceive, and because, instead of courtiers, he has brothers," etc.

To be brief, George Sand's *Le Roi attend* was a demagogic harangue addressed to the sovereign people of 1848, telling them that delightful comedies were going to be acted for them without any more waiting. The play was, in fact, full of good intentions, but for all that very absurd.

George Sand certainly had genius, but one must be allowed to remark that her dramatic work was by no means up to the level of her fiction.

She presided at our rehearsals in the green room, now sitting astride on a chair, now with her legs resting on a second chair placed opposite

to her. She used to talk and laugh a good deal with the friends she had brought with her as critics.

"Have you got a match?" she would ask every now and then to relight her pipe—a clay one with a bowl as black as a porpoise, from which she emitted great clouds of smoke.

"Here," I said to myself in my disenchantment, "is my divine Lælia!"

Good or bad, the play had a certain success, and it was decided to keep it on the bills for some little time.

It is the custom, after a first representation, for the author to go behind the scenes to thank the interpreters of his work, but George Sand abstained from conforming with this elementary piece of courtesy. We all waited several evenings to give her the opportunity of remedying her omission, but she never put in an appearance. I therefore went to see Lockroy, who was then our general manager, and told him to omit my name from the morrow's programme, for I wasn't going to act in the play of an author who showed no respect for us. Lockroy remonstrated with me, entreated me to yield, but I wouldn't; my resolution was taken.

When my comrades heard of my decision they all declared I was perfectly right, and one after the other they followed my example, so that the

next evening there was no one left to act *Le Roi attend*, which was therefore taken off the play-bills.

Of course, George Sand heard of what I had done in the matter, and it is scarcely necessary to add that she bore me no good will in consequence.

A few years later another play of hers was put on the boards at the Français. It was a little fantasy called *Comme il vous plaira* ("As you like it"), in imitation of Shakespeare. The public didn't care for it a bit. It fell perfectly flat.

At the first representation I happened to be in a box, as a spectator, next to one from which George Sand herself was looking on. She noticed me, and said to her friends in a very loud voice, "There's Judith! she's the most mediocre actress I know."

"You shall pay for that before you die," I said to myself.

Between the acts we met each other behind the scenes, and, making her a very formal bow, I said to her, "If you want to talk of anything mediocre, madame, there's *Comme il vous plaira!*"

She flounced angrily away without answering a word. The laugh was on my side now.

You will see that I had no special reason to congratulate myself on the way I was treated by either of the two lovers of Venice.

Augier and Nathalie Martel

I will now continue to recall my memories of the authors in whose plays I have acted.

I very often interpreted Émile Augier's pieces, and in 1851 I created a part in his *Diane*. I had known him for some time, for I had met him several times at the house of his mistress, Nathalie Martel, who later became the companion of the painter Boulanger. She was then acting at the Palais-Royal and, as is well known, left it for an engagement at the Français.

With regard to Émile Augier she was madly jealous, and I remember how, one day, when I was present and he happened to sneeze, she cried angrily, "I mean to know where you got that cold, Émile."

"Do be calm, Nathalie," I whispered. "A cold in the head is no proof of infidelity."

"No proof!" she yelled, "what greater proof would you have! He told me yesterday that he was going straight home, but it's easy to see if he did that he went out again, for he caught cold. Where did he go?" And, moving to him, she repeated, "Émile, I mean to know where you got that cold in your head."

She worried the poor fellow to such an extent with scenes of this description that she finally drove him away.

He fell in love with Laure Lambert, who was also a member of the Palais-Royal company.

Émile Augier's mother was still living, and one day an old friend of the worthy dame's rather thoughtlessly began talking before her of her son's relations with Laure Lambert.

Madame Augier asked for further information on the subject, but the friend felt he had already said too much and would not talk about it any more.

The next day Émile went to see his mother, and she said to him, "I hear, dear boy, that you have made friends with an Englishman."

"An Englishman?" he repeated.

"Yes, why this mystery about it. I have been told that you have relations with Lord Lambert."

"Oh, yes, yes, so I have!"

"I don't know the gentleman, but, to begin with, I can't help saying that I fully approve of your friendship with him. I know the English are generally very well-behaved, they are very well taught, and intercourse with the English aristocracy will certainly be very good for you."

"Yes, I think so," replied the son, submissively, feeling greatly relieved at the interpretation the dear old lady had put on the gossip which was going about.

Presently, however, Madame Augier could not help noticing that Émile was behaving rather

wildly. He hardly ever went to see her, spending all his time with his Laure, squandering money on her and neglecting all the duties he owed to his family. At last he was obliged to ask his mother to lend him a small sum, which she could not understand, as she knew that, young though he still was, his plays brought him in a large income.

"Émile," she said, "you really must give up your reckless ways. You ought to invest your money in something safe. Why don't you ask Lord Lambert's advice. I am sure his counsels would be valuable."

"You are quite wrong, mother, Laure Lambert advises me to spend all my money and even to get into debt."

"You are only in fun I am sure ; I have great confidence in the English. It's time you got married. I will arrange that for you, but you had better ask Lord Lambert's opinion on that, too."

"Oh, I know what it is already; Laure Lambert does not want you to arrange a marriage for me."

"Why ever not ! Would he be jealous of your wife before he knows who she is to be ! I think your English friend must be a queer fellow. I begin to suspect that you have made him out different from what he is. Why have you never presented him to me ! I very much wish you

would bring him to see me, for I should like to know him."

"I shall be very glad to do so, mother."

From that moment Madame Augier was always insisting that Lord Lambert must come and see her, and her son invented all sorts of excuses for putting off the interview. Now his friend was ill, now he had been thrown from his horse, or he was busy entertaining his fellow-countrymen who were passing through France, and so on and so on.

In the end Émile Augier married Laure Lambert and I expect that in the intimacy of their home life they often laughed over the mystification of Madame Augier in the early days of their love for each other.

One of the plays in which I scored the greatest success was the celebrated *Fiammina* which had a long run at the Français in 1857. Mario Uchard, whose story was a very singular one, was the author.

He had began life as an engraver with Firmin Didot and later entered the Conservatoire to study musical composition. He then joined a stockbroker on the exchange and for twelve years devoted himself entirely to business.

The last experience was naturally an excellent preparation for becoming a dramatic author. You don't see how? Well, having made some money

in his financial operations he married the charming Madeleine Brohan of the Comédie Française.

No doubt her suitor's pecuniary position influenced the young actress in his favour, but she really accepted him to pique some one else, for she was very much in love with the handsome Bataille, a singer at the Opéra Comique, who remained cold to her advances. He was willing enough to walk round the church with her but nothing would induce him to go into it. This did not, however, suit the views of the fair Madeleine who aspired to a legal union, so she gave her hand to Uchard when he asked for it.

A year later the newly married husband, who was a friend of mine, came to confide his domestic woes to me. Madeleine was capricious and exacting. In a word, she did not make him happy. I told Uchard that he really ought to make some allowances for the whims of such a perfectly beautiful woman.

She in her turn came to see me one day and told me her marriage was perfectly miserable. She owned she had never been in love with her husband, but she had thought he would be faithful to her as she meant to be to him. But Mario was fickle and even before he led Madeleine to the altar he had had a mistress named Maria to whom he had now returned. She declared she meant to pay him out, and though I entreated her

not to do anything of the kind she lost no time in putting her threat into execution. She left her husband's house and fled to Russia with a very handsome creole named Lysis.

Uchard tore his hair in his despair. He had neglected his wife when she was with him, and now that she was gone he mourned bitterly over her loss. That's the way with men. There had been one child born of the union between Mario and Madeleine who was deserted by the mother without compunction. I took the boy to my home and brought him up, for which his father was extremely grateful to me.

The luckless husband was never tired of telling me how much he suffered. His misery haunted him so that at last he resolved to give expression to it in a play, so he wrote *Fiammina*. It is the story of an actress who deserted her husband and child just as Madeleine had done. She goes off with a lover. The years pass on, and the child has become a man. Fiammina who has lived in exile for a long time returns to France. Her son hears things said of her which hurt him greatly. He challenges a lover of hers to a duel, and to prevent the tragic meeting the unhappy woman promises to retire to a convent.

The Comédie Française at first refused the piece. It is really very curious that nearly all the plays which have had a triumphant success

have been refused to begin with. That of Mario Uchard was only accepted when it had been read a second time.

The leading part was in the first instance offered to Madame Plessy, but she would not represent a mature woman. The author had made Fiammina about thirty-five or thirty-six years old, which was exactly the age of Madame Plessy, and there is nothing more painful to an actress than to appear on the stage looking as old as she really is.

I, who was then only thirty, lost no time in taking up the *rôle* flung aside by my fellow-actress, and it was well for me that I did.

Two of my most applauded creations, those of Charlotte Corday and Fiammina, were of parts refused by others, and I owe my greatest triumphs to the disdain of Rachel and Madame Plessy. After that let folks talk about the airs great actresses give themselves!

The name of Madame Plessy recalls an amusing anecdote about her. I take the opportunity of telling it here lest it should be lost, which would really be a pity.

Some time after the death of her husband whose name was Arnould, Madame Plessy became the mistress of Prince Napoleon, and one night a spiritualistic séance, such as was then the fashion, was being held at the residence of the

latter in the Palais-Royal. An Italian magnetiser had told the guests of the Prince that he was about to call up the dead. He said all the lights were to be put out, and that in the darkness those present would receive visits from the departed. It was enough to think of those who had left the earth for their presence to be felt, perhaps even to be seen.

Madame Plessy was among the guests, and Prince Napoleon was sitting beside her. At a signal given by the spiritualist the room became perfectly dark, and at first there was absolute silence. Suddenly, however, Madame Plessy was heard crying out in a distressed voice—

"Arnould! Arnould! Is it you? Oh, don't pinch me! Oh, have mercy! Oh, forgive me for having forgotten you! My poor husband! my poor husband!"

The lights were hastily turned on again, and Madame Plessy was found to be terribly upset. As for Prince Napoleon it was all he could do to keep from bursting out laughing. It was very evident that he had played the part of the departed.

CHAPTER XIX

Alexander Dumas the younger and the *Dame aux Camélias*—How I came to know Marie Duplessis—A humble-minded courtesan—A visit to the *Dame aux Camélias*—The Baron de Stackelberg promises to provide for her as a father—She warns me against an unscrupulous suitor—The death of Marie Duplessis—Madame Doche as a courtesan—The daughters of a baron and a barber—A consumptive woman with a finely developed bust.

I CAN say of Alexander Dumas the younger as I did of his father, that I have always known him. They were both equally good and loyal friends to me.

The name of the former at once calls up for me the memory of the original of the *Dame aux Camélias*. I was brought into interesting relations with the woman who was immortalized in that play. It's a story I feel I must tell.

I was then at the Variétés, and was suddenly taken ill. In the middle of an act, in full view of the audience, I fainted away, seized with brain fever. This breakdown in public of course lent a kind of dramatic interest to the catastrophe, and many who took an interest in my modest talent became anxious about me and wanted to express their sympathy in some way.

When I began to get better a splendid bouquet was brought to me every day. The person who brought it was a lady who did not give her name and would not come in to see me. My servant told me that she was very beautiful, and that judging from her distinguished appearance she must belong to the highest rank.

I gave orders one day that the next day she came a letter from me should be given to her. In it I begged her very earnestly to lay aside her incognito. She answered me by letter too. Hers ran thus—

"MADEMOISELLE,

"The admiration I feel for your talent made me most anxious about your health, and I am very glad indeed to hear that you are better and that I may soon have the pleasure of applauding you again. Forgive me, however, for having hidden my name. I was afraid that if you knew it you would refuse to accept my flowers. And now I fear, lest learning it, you should decline to receive them any longer.

"Your devoted and unworthy admirer,

"MARIE DUPLESSIS."

"Well, I never," I said to myself, "it's the famous beauty Marie Duplessis, so well known amongst those who are fond of pleasure."

I can't exactly tell what it was in her letter that delighted me so. Perhaps it was the

humility so rare amongst courtesans. I resolved to disregard prejudice against her, and I begged Marie Duplessis to come and see me. Thus encouraged she complied.

There was an extraordinary charm about her. She was very slight, almost too thin ; but, oh, so refined looking, so marvellously graceful ; her face was of an angelic oval shape, her large dark eyes were full of seductive melancholy, her complexion was dazzling, and her hair, that resembled masses of black silk, was perfectly magnificent.

She talked about Dumas and the great musician Liszt, who were both friends of hers, and we discussed theatrical matters. She was very intellectual, and her conversation was most captivating. As soon as I was able to go out I went to return her call.

She lived on the Boulevard de la Madeleine, nearly opposite to the church of the same name, as if she wished to place herself under the protection of the saint, who, before she consecrated her life to God had trafficked in her beauty.

She showed me over her rooms, which were full of the scent of flowers, for it was not true as people used to say that she only cared for those without smell. She loved them all, and it was just a whim of Dumas' imagination to say that camelias alone appealed to her.

Her home was decorated and furnished in the Louis XV style. There were couches covered with Beauvais tapestry, rosewood tables on which were vases designed by Clodion, exquisite nicknacks by Riesener, and copper bowls by Gouthière, more like what you would expect to find in a palace or a museum than in a private residence.

She pointed out to me the beauties of each work of art with the enthusiasm of a connoisseur, laughing when she showed me a piece of Sèvres porcelain representing a tipsy bacchante being teased by a faun. . . . Presently she began to sing in a way that revealed the correctness of her ear.

"You are happy?" I asked, and she replied lightly, "Oh yes, of course I am." Then suddenly becoming grave she added, "No, no, I am not happy, and you never supposed that I was!"

I took her hand, and she began to tell me about her life. She was the daughter of a pedlar of Normandy, and she hid her face when she told me how she had begun to go wrong. To my question what had led her to take the first steps in the downward path, she answered—

"A workwoman's wages would never have got me the luxury for which I had an irresistible craving. But in spite of all the appearances

against me, I swear to you that I am neither covetous nor utterly degraded. I wanted to know the refined pleasures of a cultivated taste, the joy of living in educated and elegant society. I always chose my lovers for myself. And I have loved—oh, yes, I have loved deeply, but no one has ever returned my love, and that is the real horror of my life."

As she said these words she was evidently on the point of bursting out weeping, but she went on—

"Young people have sometimes confided their sentimental woes to me, and I have even shed tears with them over their agonies; but not a single one has ever cared to enquire whether my heart were suffering too.

"I once said to one of my lovers, 'you know the love I give to you is true love. I should like to belong only to you.'

"He was flattered, but answered with a smile—

"'I don't ask as much as that!' And when this indifference made me sigh, he cried—

"'You are not at all amusing when you are melancholy. Try to be gay, or I shan't come to see you again.'

"So I tried to seem happy, but when I was left alone I wept bitterly. I am afraid all this that I am telling you seems very stupid."

"No, it isn't," I assured her. "You are

worth infinitely more than many of those who condemn you."

"Oh," she went on. "It is a mistake for a courtesan to have a heart."

She began to cough as she spoke, and I told her that dwelling on the past was bad for her; but she took no notice of what I said, and continued—

"I know well that I shall die young. If I could find happiness I should live, but this grief will kill me. Still I have really no right to complain of my fate. Just listen to what happened to me last summer—

"I had gone to Spa to recruit my health, and in my daily walks beneath the pines I constantly met an old gentleman who used to look at me in an adoring way. His white hair and dignified bearing inspired respect, and though his eyes seemed to smile whenever they fell on me they were full of melancholy. He evidently went out of his way to meet me, and sometimes he even walked beside me for a little way, never taking his eyes off me. 'The man is madly in love with me,' I said to myself.

"At last one day he actually ventured to accost me, and I was wondering how to get rid of him when he said—

"'Don't be afraid, mademoiselle, that I mean to make love to you, that would neither suit my

age nor my humour. There is no doubt that you are very beautiful, but you will guess with what sort of feelings your beauty inspires me when I tell you that I have just lost a daughter whom you resemble like a sister. . . . Poor child. How I loved her!'

"He paused a moment with his eyes fixed on me, filled with infinite tenderness, as if he saw the lost one once more. He then went on deliberately—

"'Mademoiselle, I have a request to make to you. It is that you should often think of my daughter. You know how people sometimes ask artists to paint portraits of those that are dead. Well, you will be the living portrait of my daughter. I know the kind of life you lead. I have made enquiries about you. Will you give that life up? I will make you any allowance you like to name if you will. I have not yet told you my name. I am the Baron de Stackelberg, and I belong to a very ancient and wealthy Polish family. Accept the offer I make to you. The innocent expression of your beautiful features proves that your conduct is at issue with your true nature. Help me to do a doubly good action: to honour the memory of the dead and restore honour to the living.'

"I cannot tell you how deeply this proposal touched me. It was the first time I had ever

been spoken to like that. I gazed on the old man who could have the charity to compare a poor fallen girl to a child who had died in her unsullied maidenhood. I was silent; my only answer being to wipe away my tears.

"He exclaimed: 'You consent then. Thank you.'

"From that moment he met all my expenses. He would not let me cut them down, he even added to my luxuries. It was he who installed me in these rooms. He often came to see me during the months that succeeded our first meeting. He still comes, but his visits are rarer, for alas! I have not kept the tacit promise I made to him.

"For some time I lived without lovers. I hoped to rehabilitate myself. I even dreamt that I might perhaps meet with some young man who would understand my repentance and make me his permanent companion. Oh, my God, how I would have loved him! With what tenderness, with what joy I would have filled his life. But no one came to me except adventurers attracted by the money I had at my disposal.

"Young men who might have won my heart scouted my ideas of marriage, made sport of my good resolutions and flung my past in my face.

"I realized that my former misdeeds condemned me irrevocably, and that a woman who has once fallen can never rise again, no matter how sincere her repentance.

"Then in my despair I went back to the ways that are killing me."

She coughed again more violently than before, and when I expressed my deep commiseration for her she suddenly gave vent to a forced laugh and cried—

"But all I have been telling you about my sadness has been just to make myself interesting. You were quite taken in. I am a good hand at acting, am I not? Almost as good as you are yourself. I really am wildly happy. I never have any gloomy moments. Only just look at me," and she jumped up and sprang across the room singing.

Needless to say this pretence did not deceive me.

I often went to see her after that. One day I met her in the Bois de Boulogne, and I can still see her as she was then. She was in a carriage wearing a magnificent dark blue velvet mantle lined with pink satin over a pale green dress trimmed with black velvet. On her head was a black toque with a feather fastened in with a diamond brooch.

I was walking on one of the side paths, and

she made me an almost imperceptible sign of recognition, so as not to compromise me by seeming to know me.

All the same, I went up to her, and as the horses were only walking, I said, " Get out and come for a turn with me."

She hesitated a minute, and then jumping down she came and walked beside me.

There were crowds in the Bois that day, and many people saw us together. Some of my friends blamed, others, who pitied my companion, approved of what I had done. As for her she so appreciated this public mark of friendship that it won her deep gratitude, which she proved a little time afterwards. A certain Baron de C. was then courting me and wished to marry me. He seemed a nice fellow, and I was rather taken with him. We had actually fixed the date for signing the contract, when one day Marie Duplessis came to see me to tell me that my suitor had been paying her attention just before he proposed to me, and had asked her to marry him, falling back on me when he was refused by her. She described his embarrassed position, with crowds of creditors clamouring at his heels, and proved that his marriage with me was to him merely a financial speculation. The result was that the match was broken off, and I had every reason to congratulate myself on my

escape when I heard to what equivocal expedients my former wooer resorted to get a living.

So the kindness I showed to the Dame aux Camélias was not thrown away.

She died a year later, in 1846.

A few days before the end, although she was really already in a dying condition, she insisted on being taken to the Palais-Royal Theatre to enjoy for the last time the pleasure she loved better than any other. Two big footmen in livery carried her from her brougham to the door of her box, and at the end of the performance a most pathetic smile of gratitude to the players lit up her pale, emaciated and almost transparent features.

After this she took to bed, never to rise from it again, and one morning, wrapped in the costliest laces, she was laid in a coffin filled with flowers. Five or six days afterwards all her belongings in the Boulevard de Madeleine were sold, her chaste-minded heirs, who did not object to using her money, making virtuous haste to disperse everything that could recall her memory.

I had also for a short time certain relations with Madame Doche, the actress who created the part of the Dame aux Camélias in Alexander Dumas the younger's play.

The author had at first proposed to Madame

Fargueil that she should take it, but she had declined, indignantly declaring she was not going to appear in such a character. Madame Doche also made a show of objection, saying to Dumas, "I shall find it rather difficult to interpret the lady in question. You see I have never had anything to do with courtesans. Come, tell me how they dress."

"Very much as you do yourself, my dear friend," was the author's insolent retort.

One day Nathalie, of whom I have already spoken, invited me to a friendly little luncheon to meet Madame Doche. They both had their little vanities, as who has not at the theatre. Madame Doche began to boast of her high descent, and said she was proud of being the daughter of the highly-born Englishman, Baron Plunket, and I replied, "Nathalie is still prouder of being the daughter of a barber."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Madame Doche.

"There's no reason for saying 'Pooh!'" protested Nathalie, "for there's all the more credit to me for having raised myself from such a humble position."

They got quite excited over the discussion, and I began to be afraid they would tear each other's hair out.

"What nonsense it is," I interposed, "to dispute about where you came from. You are

both equals now, and equally worthy to be the mothers of princes."

As every actress dreams of a royal lover, this remark of mine delighted them, so that they both jumped up and kissed me.

If Madame Doche may be said to have created the *rôle* of the Dame aux Camélias, I was the first to interpret it in the provinces. It was not without difficulty that I procured the necessary authorization, for people are always more prudish in the country than in Paris. The piece had been the rage on the boulevards of the capital for a year before the embargo on it was removed in the rest of France. Fortunately, however, the authorities thought that my position as a member of the Comédie Française would act as a salve to consciences easily shocked, and they removed their veto in my favour.

Just before starting on my tour I met Madame Lagier at Versailles, the portly actress whom you will remember the elder Dumas held up at arm's length to prove his herculean strength.

"Ah!" she said to me, "you have cut the ground from under my feet. I thought I was to be the one to act the Dame aux Camélias in the provinces."

"You, my dear," I exclaimed. "I can't imagine your dying of consumption with a magnificent bust like yours."

CHAPTER XX

Dramatic criticism under the Second Empire—The physiological reason for Jules Janin's impartiality—Théophile Gautier as critic on the *Moniteur*—His scheme to win the friendship of a pasha—Mario and Giulia Grisi give each other striking proofs of their affection—Roger de Beauvoir—A hunt for a flea—A creditor imprisoned in a suit of armour.

I HAVE been talking about dramatic authors, now I must say something about dramatic critics. At the time of which I am writing—that is to say at the end of the romantic movement under the Second Empire—they proved themselves to be very independent of outside influence. This is such a rare virtue that it deserves to be noted. But, what am I saying? I am firmly convinced that criticism at the present day is no less impartial, and I would take my oath on it that dramatic criticism is never influenced either by the blandishments of actresses or considerations of friendship. You laugh? Well, you are wrong to do so.

To prove that you are I will quote a single example of the severe probity of critics—the mishap that befell Count Walewski, the son of Napoleon I and a Polish lady named Walewski,

who exercised a good deal of influence as one of Napoleon the Third's Ministers.

Having had a piece put on the boards of the Français he was very roughly handled in the newspapers as a worthless scribbler—a severity he well deserved, for he had been warned by his friend Vatout that the play was very inferior, and advised to withdraw it. He had invited that writer to come to one of the final rehearsals of his work; and as the acting proceeded he saw the great critic's brow getting darker and darker. So he said to him—

"You evidently think my play bad?"

"It certainly isn't good," replied Vatout with brutal frankness, adding, "and it's such an easy thing to do."

"What, to write a play?" cried Walewski.

"No; to refrain from writing one," was the the crushing but clever retort.

In spite of it, however, Walewski insisted on exposing the fruit of his brain to the glare of the footlights, covering himself thereby with ridicule.

Jules Janin, chief of the critics of his day, was very well fitted for judging the merits of actresses without partiality, for Nature in her prophetic wisdom had made him insensible to the darts of Cupid—a quality that it would be well for editors to insist on their critics sharing.

None in fact should be allowed to wield the rod except those whom the Grand Turk would consider fit guardians of his seraglio.

Amongst Jules Janin's fellow-journalists—the one I knew best—was Théophile Gautier, who was critic on the *Moniteur*. He proved his sympathy for me by giving my Christian or rather my theatrical name to one of his daughters, Judith Gautier, who wrote several plays with a subtle exotic charm about them. She evidently inherited her love of the vivid colouring and imagination of the Orient from her father. I remember that at one time Théo Gautier actually dreamt of becoming a Turk. He came to see me one day wearing a red fez ; and as soon as he got into my room he donned some beautiful red Turkish slippers, turned up at the toes, which he had brought with him in his pockets.

"I have the soul of a Mussulman," he said to me, "a proof of which is that I am very idle. I should like to sit on my heels all day long smoking a nargileh or a chibouk. Our civilization with its factories and smoke disgusts me. I want the blue sky. I want a harem of white almehs who will feed me with sweetmeats made of roses and give me good strong Mocha coffee to sip. I am just going to start for the East to become a Turk."

"But," I enquired, "what will you live on? How will you feed your almehs?"

"Oh, I have my own ideas. I am not so much of a poet as I look. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy a few barrels of good wine. I will make a careful selection from the best vintages, and will take a little cargo over with me.

"I know the Koran forbids wine to the faithful, so you may be quite sure they are passionately fond of it. I shall land on the coast of Asia Minor and make up to some pasha whom I shall select because of his good looks—a regular jolly pasha, a portly fellow with a jovial expression, a long fan-shaped beard, a big potato of a nose and little cunning eyes.

"I shall make him take my wares. Oh, he will be in the seventh heaven, or rather in Paradise, among the houris. He will ask for more. I will carefully cultivate his love of drinking and his friendship. I will study his preferences and will get fresh supplies from France of the vintages he likes best. He will not be able to get on without me. He will make me his adviser, his bashaw, and all my dreams will thus be realized."

All this nonsense made me roar with laughter.

Théo went on: "And you must come with me. I will take you. My pasha will want you to teach the women in his harem how to act

plays. You are not better fitted than I am to live in this foggy climate. You are a daughter of the sun. I can just fancy you in large, full, green silk trousers, a pink scarf, a little azure blue bodice fringed with beads, and sequins in your black hair.

"Wait a minute. I am going to arrange your coiffure. In default of sequins give me a pearl necklace, which I will twist into your hair," and before I could say "yes" or "no" the mad fellow had taken down my hair and done it up again in a fashion of his own. "There!" he said; "now you are my favourite slave. Look at yourself in the glass. Am I not clever?"

The next minute he asked me if I had some coloured stuffs or old silk petticoats, and in a trice he had wound a turban as big as a pumpkin about his head and draped himself in a flowing costume which he pulled in at the waist with a curtain that did duty as a sash. Then seizing an empty bon-bon box that lay on the table he began playing on it as if it were a tambourine and to dance in the most comic manner, yelling out a Mussulman song.

"I shall get my pasha!" he shouted. "He won't be able to resist me!"

Oh, what a charming fool he was!

A little while after this I was touring in

Belgium and Ernesta Grisi, Gautier's wife, came to see me in my hotel at Brussels. She had taken an engagement as a singer, and had appeared at several concerts, but, unfortunately, her manager turned out to be dishonest, and had not paid her the fees he had promised, so that she found herself absolutely penniless. She told me she had written to Théophile to ask him for some money, and the only reply he had made was—

"You might as well try to get work out of a dead donkey. I haven't so much as a maravedi. I live on credit at restaurants where I am known. When I speak of borrowing to my friends their money all takes to itself wings, and, in pathetic tones, the wretches declare that they have not a brass farthing to spare for me. My poor dear little Ernesta, you must come back to me. I am longing to have my beautiful beloved one with me. Oh, what a nuisance want of money is!"

Ernesta showed this letter to me, and at once assuring her that not another word was needed, I gave her the necessary funds to take her home, saying as I did so—

"Tell Théo not to worry, his pasha will pay me back. Mind you repeat those very words to him."

Poor Gautier! in spite of his great gifts, he

lived all his life in the Château de la Misère (the castle of misery), in which dwelt the celebrated Captain Fracasse, and less fortunate than his hero, he never left it for the Manoir de Bonheur (Mansion of Bliss).

As I am talking of Ernesta Grisi I may be pardoned for making a digression to say something of her cousin, Giulia Grisi, the world-renowned singer. She had married Mario, a tenor no less celebrated than herself. They loved each other very tenderly as husband and wife should, but, like all artists, they were madly and furiously jealous of each other professionally. When they sang duets together each tried to excel the other, greatly to the advantage of the public, but if Mario happened to win more applause than Giulia the latter would set upon him behind the scenes, scratching his face or boxing his ears, whilst, if it were the other way round and she got more cheers, he would shake her as he would a plum-tree to make the fruit fall. For all that, these little periodical tiffs did not at all weaken their reciprocal affection. It was Ernesta who gave me these truculent details.

After dwelling as I have in the preceding chapters on the *élite* of the writers of my day I must mention an author of less importance, but who yet had his hour of success. I refer to

Roger de Beauvoir, whom I knew well and who was a good friend to me.

A handsome man with long black hair and a dark complexion, a good figure and distinguished manners, provided, moreover, with a modest fortune, he was to be met at all the literary re-unions and theatrical suppers. He had had no end of romantic adventures, had fought dozens of duels, and dispensed his favours right and left. His novel, the *Chevalier de St. George*, won him well-merited renown.

He married Mademoiselle Dozé of the Théâtre Français, and made her very miserable, not because he was exactly a bad man, but because his frivolity and heedlessness quite unfitted him for domestic felicity.

He used to indulge in all kinds of mad pranks, the taste of which was certainly questionable. One night, for instance, when he and his wife were stopping at their country château, he suddenly jumped out of bed and, with nothing on but his nightshirt, he ran out to the big bell and began ringing it violently, going on till all his own servants were roused and the peasants from the neighbouring villages had rushed half-naked to the rescue, bearing torches and lanterns.

"Whatever is the matter, Monsieur de Beauvoir?" they all cried. "Why are you ringing like that? What danger is threatening you?"

"There is a flea in my bed that prevents me from closing an eye," was the calm reply. "You must come and look for it and rescue me from it!"

Some of those called out like this were ready to murder the joker, and they would have had every excuse for it. His wife very soon had enough of these culpable tricks, and the pair were presently separated.

One day Madame de Beauvoir was taken dangerously ill, and her husband, learning this from the newspaper, could think of nothing better to do than to send her a crown!

As he led a very luxurious life and only worked with wise moderation, he was quickly overwhelmed with debts.

His children—he had two—were left to him by the deed of separation. He undertook their education, and one of the lessons he taught them was how to keep at bay the creditors who constantly besieged his residence. He armed them with syringes and told them that, when Monsieur Dimanche[1] rang at the door, they were to squirt water at him through the keyhole.

One of his tradesmen, however, managed, no one knows how, to evade the watering

[1] Monsieur Dimanche is a character in Molière's *Don Juan*, who has become the type in France of a timid creditor won over by the cajolerie of his debtor.—TRANS.

awaiting him and got into the hall. He was a sturdy little fellow in a very bad humour, and, on finding himself face to face with the defaulter, he planted himself in the middle of the ante-chamber and declared in a loud voice—

"I am not going to budge from here till I get my money."

"All right," replied Roger de Beauvoir. "As you intend stopping with me such a long time you had better come into my study, and I will keep you company there to save you from being dull."

"Monsieur de Beauvoir," was the angry retort, "it is no laughing matter."

"I am not laughing at you; I am only offering you my hospitality. Be good enough to go in first."

"Yes, I will go in, and we will talk over our affairs."

"So be it!"

Now, in Roger de Beauvoir's study there were a number of valuable antiques, including some very fine mediæval armour.

The creditor looked at them with some surprise.

"You admire the armour?" enquired his host. But the other man maintained a sulky attitude and remained silent.

"Oh," remarked De Beauvoir, "there is

plenty of time to discuss the matter you have come about, and as my little museum seems to interest you, I shall be only too happy to do the honours of it for your benefit. Look at this magnificent fourteenth-century coat of mail. It will turn aside the most violent lance-thrusts. Just see how closely the metallic web is woven. Do just feel it."

The creditor condescended to feel it.

The next minute the novelist showed him a superb piece of armour of the time of Philip Augustus, and the creditor examined and fingered it all over, testing the weight of the helmet, gorget, brassarts, cuishes, etc., by taking them up in his hand. He was evidently quite won over.

"The warriors of those days must have looked terrible in all this iron paraphernalia," he remarked presently in undisguised admiration.

"Would you like to try this suit of armour on yourself?" asked Roger de Beauvoir. "Then you can tell exactly how it was used."

The creditor demurred a minute or two, and then agreed, for the suggestion really charmed him. So De Beauvoir helped him into the formidable panoply of metal, imprisoning limbs, torso, and head, carefully screwing all the pieces together, and, finally, locking the visor with a key. Then he said to his victim—

"Let me see you walk!"

The armour was so heavy that the poor fellow could hardly take three steps.

"It is heavy and no mistake," said De Beauvoir. "That's why those who wore it never walked. They were helped into the saddle and their horses carried them. When they fell they could not get up again without the help of their lackeys.

"But," he added, "I must wish you good-morning now, for I have to be off. It's twelve o'clock and I am due at the restaurant where I always lunch. You mean to stop here till I pay you. Well, stop here; I shall find you here when I get back."

The creditor protested and groaned in vain. De Beauvoir left him in his iron shell and went out, double-locking the door of his room.

When he returned his prisoner was in a very much milder mood, and entreated him to let him out, promising that he would take himself off at once and insist no more on the immediate payment of what was due to him.

De Beauvoir, reassured by this declaration, consented on this condition to restore the poor man to liberty.

CHAPTER XXI

A Bonaparte Princess—Napoleon III expels her from France—Niniche becomes my pupil—The will of the Marquis de Pommereu—The Princess becomes Signora Rattazzi—Madame Bluebeard—Jules Lecomte as the lover of the ex-Empress Maria-Louisa—The Romance of Valérie and Gustave Fould, son of the Minister of Finance.

I was married in 1859. The match was not a very happy one, and I shall say as little as possible about it. I mean to keep to the rule I have so far followed in these Memoirs and only relate those events of my life with which celebrated people were mixed up.

It was a little time after my marriage that I happened to meet the madcap woman known as Bonaparte Wyse. She was then the mistress of François Ponsard, the retiring poet of whom I have spoken above, who, after leading a very virtuous, almost an austere, life until he was over thirty, suddenly fell under a spell, and dropping all his old habits, indulged in every variety of excess, as if he wished to make up for having denied himself so long. This is often the case, I believe, with those who are so very strait-laced when they are young. There is a medium in all things after all.

The lady who had thus infatuated the author of *Lucrèce* was the grand-daughter of Lucien Bonaparte (brother of Napoleon I) and the daughter of Lætitia Bonaparte and an English member of parliament, Sir Thomas Wyse.

She had received an education, no doubt an excellent one, at the Legion d'Honneur Academy, but there was not much sign of it to be seen.

One day when she was still quite a girl a somewhat heated remonstrance from her mother, perhaps enforced by a blow, for the women of the Bonaparte family are often violent, so enraged her that, to escape from home discipline, she literally threw herself at the head of Monsieur de S., who fell in love with and married her.

When the Empire was established she hoped that she would be treated as a member of the reigning family, but Napoleon III prudently kept her at a distance, for he was afraid of the impetuous young woman. She then set about to gather about her in her salon a little group of people hostile to the Government, but she was denounced and exiled from France, when she betook herself to Italy in a very bad humour.

A few years later she got permission to return. Her husband was dead, and in Italy she had assumed the title of Princess, with a view to emphasizing her claim to relationship with the Bonapartes, which they indignantly repudiated.

It was this somewhat embarrassing aspirant to high rank who laid siege to the hapless Ponsard ; and he was not her only victim. It must be admitted that she was really fascinating. She was a brunette, with regular features of a classic type and something of the masculine style characteristic of the women of her family.

The Marquis de Pommereu was madly in love with her, and she did not repulse him, although his skin was yellower than a lemon. He was fabulously rich, which may possibly have made up for his jaundiced complexion.

He had inherited some of the millions of the Marquis d'Aligre, whose son-in-law he was ; and the only reason why his father-in-law did not bequeath the whole of his fortune to him was because of a strange compact that nobleman had made with his doctor.

The story is well worth telling, and I shall, I hope, be excused for making a digression in its favour.

The Marquis d'Aligre, when he was getting old, clung all the more closely to the pleasures of this life, and determined to secure all possible assistance from the best human science to prolong his existence, so he sent for a very clever young doctor, and said to him—

"Take care of me. I will make you my private physician, and you may become very

rich through serving me. The first year I will give you so much," naming a good round sum, " the second I will give you one-third more ; the third year yet another third, and so on to the end. If you only keep me alive long enough, you might get all the money I have. I will not, however, conceal from you that your task will not be an easy one, for I am not, alas ! in anything like good health."

The doctor did his best, and managed to annex a considerable portion of his patient's wealth, though what was left for the Marquis de Pommereu was no inconsiderable sum, and, no doubt, his yellow skin seemed to the Princess to reflect his piles of gold.

But to return to Ponsard. One day he came to me and said—

" I have a great favour to ask of you, Judith. Niniche "—that was the pet name given to the Princess by her intimates—" is going to give a *fête*, and has taken it into her head to act one of my plays : *Horace et Lydie*. Now, she hasn't the faintest notion of dramatic art, and I know she will murder my verses. Will you be so good as to give her a few lessons ? "

I, of course, hastened to comply with his wishes, and I went to see the lady in question at a time appointed by her.

I found her in *déshabille*, fresh from the bath,

and suggested that she should complete her toilette before we began the rehearsal, to which she replied : " No ; I am more comfortable as I am. Let's begin."

" Very well. Now stand there in the middle of the room and pose yourself ! Hullo, though, mind that chair ! mind that table ! You will bruise yourself if you don't look out. My goodness me, you really frighten me ! "

Never I must confess, did I give a lesson under such conditions before. The stupid woman wouldn't listen to a word I said. She considered herself very gifted, and quite able to dispense with any study of her part. It was quite useless for me to attempt to convince her to the contrary.

As a matter of course I was invited to the reception at which Ponsard's piece was to be interpreted. My husband was there too. The Princess acted abominably and did me no credit as a pupil. The part of Horace was taken by the clever journalist, Tony Revellon, and amongst the audience were Ponsard, Pommereu and the Prince de Polignac, with all of whom as well as with her fellow-actor and my husband, the hostess flirted outrageously.

She had every reason to hope that the Marquis de Pommereu would remember her in his will, and as a matter of fact he bequeathed

her everything he possessed, much to the disgust of the testator's relations who clamoured for their rights, as well they might, like eagles fighting over carrion. The fair Princess was obliged to consent to a compromise, and condescended to content herself with a pension of ten thousand francs a month, which was by no means to be despised.

Her adventures were not yet over for after she went back to Italy she managed to cajole the great patriot Rattazzi, who was then beginning to get old, and who, bravely facing ridicule, actually married her. Rattazzi died in 1873. It was said of "Bonaparte Wyse" that she buried all her husbands, and the nickname of Madame Bluebeard was given to her. Five years later she contracted yet another marriage, with a Spaniard this time, Señor de R., to whom, though she was now quite advanced in life, she bore several children. It has been an amusement to me to give a sketch here of this cosmopolitan heroine, and I hope it has also diverted the reader. The chequered, exciting and picturesque career of the Princess is very characteristic of manners and customs under the second Empire.

I will now tell you something about other notabilities whose adventures will give you an insight into pretty well every rank of life during the same period.

My husband and I were both very much attached to the journalist Jules Lecomte. He had been an officer in the navy, and had retired to devote himself to business. He had at one time been unjustly condemned for defalcations, but had succeeded in obtaining rehabilitation. Smarting under the cruel judgment, he fled to Italy, where he got his living by singing in concerts, for he had a very fine voice. He became acquainted during his exile with the ex-Empress, Maria Theresa, who took a fancy to him, and for a time he was the successor of Napoleon I in the heart of the fickle archduchess. He used to tell us that the position was not exactly an enviable one, and that he used sometimes to wake suddenly in the night and start up in bed, fancying that the cold hand of the spectre of St. Helena had been laid upon him.

Later he returned to France where his talent, his merry humour, and many interesting memories won him troops of friends. He wrote chiefly in the *Indépendance Belge*, and his vigorous dramatic criticism in that important paper gave him a very influential position in theatrical circles. His house was, therefore, much frequented by actors and actresses.

At one of his receptions a charming little actress from the Théâtre Français, Josephine

Simonin, known as Valérie, was present. Now Lecomte was passionately interested in spiritualism, and on this occasion he hypnotized Valérie, and when she was in a deep sleep he begged us to ask her questions. I was one of the first to do so; and the answers she gave astonished me, for she told me things which I was quite certain were known to me alone. I felt rather like Sosia must have done, when after listening to the revelations of Mercury he exclaimed—

> "Of all this nothing had been known
> Had it not been in the bottle!"[1]

I am well aware that according to diviners we are only impressed by that which is in accordance with real facts, and that we unconsciously ignore all that is false. In my case, however, it must be owned that the coincidences were perfectly extraordinary.

After I had had my turn Lecomte asked Valérie about her own future fate, and she replied that she would be loved by an obscure young man, who for all that was the son of one of the greatest personages of Europe, that she would be persecuted because of this love, but in the end would find some happiness in it, only

[1] This is a quotation from Molière's *Amphitryon*, in which Mercury is represented as assuming the appearance of Sosia, one of the characters, the better to carry out the orders of Jupiter. Sosia has become the type of one who imitates the voice and gestures of another.—TRANS.

later to be again overtaken by misfortune, and that at last she would become a princess.

I jotted down all she said on a sheet of paper which I afterwards showed to Valérie, who only laughed at it. How much I wished afterwards that I had kept my scrawl !

Now listen to the true story of Josephine Simonin.

A little time afterwards she inspired young Gustave Fould, son of Achille Fould, then Secretary of State, and later Minister of Finance under the Second Empire, with a great passion for her. She was not insensible to her lover's pleading, and went to live in rooms he rented for her, where the two turtle-doves billed and cooed to their hearts' content.

Alas ! the Secretary of State found out what was going on, and disapproved of it. He inveighed against such proceedings on the ground of their immorality, and on account of what to a Minister was perhaps of even more importance, the effect they would have on public opinion. To be brief, he banished his son to England, but Gustave had not been there two weeks before Valérie joined him. The irate father then cut off the allowance of his heir, who betook himself to the celebrated Caussidière who had taken so great a share in the overthrow of the July monarchy.

A Traveller in Wines and Spirits

How did it come about that that revolutionary was in England? This is how it was. After the February days he had been promoted to the position of Prefect of Police, and the decidedly humorous idea occurred to him to enrol in the force all the anarchists, rioters and incendiaries he could get hold of, and to confide to them the mission of protecting society. Imagine a shepherd employing wolves as sheep dogs.

"I bring order out of disorder," he would say with a grand air.

It followed naturally that at the very first insurrection he and his followers ranged themselves on the side of the makers of barricades.

He was dismissed, and after compromising himself again in 1848, he was compelled to flee to England, where he became a traveller in wines and spirits, a very prosaic end for a full-blown demagogue.

Young Fould setting at nought what people might say, now went to Caussidière and asked him to give him employment, and the ex-Prefect very readily made him his assistant. The son of the Secretary of State of France, associated with the former revolutionary leader, now went about London and the provinces with his pockets bulging out with little bottles.

The aristocratic Achille Fould found this state of things intolerable, and he managed to get the

English Government to worry his son so much that the latter found it impossible to stop in England.

Gustave therefore took refuge in Germany, still accompanied by Valérie, whom nothing would induce to leave him, although if she had gone back to the Comédie Française she could have led a luxurious and enviable life.

The pair became acquainted with the most dreadful misery. Gustave took the most humble employments to gain bread for himself and his beloved. He served in shops as a commissionaire, even as a news vendor. His people did not lose sight of him, and hoped that despair would in the end compel the prodigal son to return home, but they waited in vain. It was then that they begged me to interfere.

CHAPTER XXII

How I set forth in pursuit of Gustave Fould and Valérie—The eloquent witness of a pair of hob-nailed boots—A review held by Prince Frederick Charles—I am received coldly by Gustave Fould—Valérie's short-lived troubles—She becomes Princess S.—How I became acquainted with the banker Osiris—How I hid him in my room during a stormy period of his existence.

One day Adolphe Fould, the elder brother of Gustave, came to see me on behalf of his father.

"You are Valérie's friend," he explained, "and know her better than any one else. You are aware that she is living with my brother in Germany. My father is broken-hearted at the false position Gustave is in. Will you undertake a mission to his lady love?"

"What do you want me to do?"

"To go and find her in Germany and tell her that if she will consent to leave my brother, she may depend on a very liberal compensation. You are authorized to state that she will be made a full societaire [1] of the Comédie Française.

[1] The members of the Comédie Française company were divided into two classes, the *societaires* or permanent staff, and the *pensionnaires* or temporary players engaged occasionally only. —Trans.

I was struck with the way in which politicians to serve their own private ends disposed of appointments which ought to be the reward of special merit.

Little Valérie, it seems to me, has got on better in her career by making her Gustave fall in love with her, than she could have by conscientious and persevering study of the parts she had to take at the theatre. All the same I agreed to be the bearer of the Minister's proposition.

My husband went with me to Germany, and we had a good deal of trouble in tracing the lovers, whose poverty compelled them to lead a wandering life. When we got to Düsseldorf, where we expected to find them, we heard that they were probably at the neighbouring village of Butchen. Thither, therefore, we went, and we duly found the hovel in which they had been living, but the birds themselves had left the nest.

Under the bed we noticed an ancient pair of clumsily made hob-nailed boots, gaping at the sides, and so trodden down that the heels had disappeared.

The peasant who showed us the hovel told us that these shoes had belonged to the Minister's son, and added the information that young Fould and his companion had gone to Aix-la-Chapelle.

"Well, let us go there, too," I said, "as there seems nothing better to do."

Presently we found ourselves on the parade ground, and for some little time we watched the evolutions of the troops in silence.

They were being reviewed by Prince Charles Frederick, who riding a black horse and wearing his favourite uniform, that of the black Brunswickers, with the death's head badge, was watching them with an expression of extraordinary gravity.

Files of infantry wheeled round as one man, rapidly changing front as if all the men in them were passive machines in the hands of their chiefs, and the ground resounded with the rhythmic and sonorous beat of their feet. Batteries of guns were rolling and bounding along, or whirling round with a noise like hell let loose. A signal, and tongues of fire shot out from their mouths, which spit forth clouds of white smoke, then harnessed again to their teams they dashed away at full speed.

Everything, men, horses, cannon, was black, forbidding, sinister.

Ah, it was very unlike the showy reviews that used to be held in France in those days for the delighted astonishment of nurses and children. White gaiters, top-knots, plumes and feathers, pretty Arab horses, whinnying and

prancing. No ! it was a dismal picture of war in time of peace.

I tapped my husband on the arm, and said—

"Those are no toy soldiers !"

"By Jove," was the reply, "I shouldn't care to come to blows with them !"

The memory of that review ground near Düsseldorf was, alas ! to come back to us in 1870.

Next day I at last found the abode of Gustave Fould at Aix-la-Chapelle, and I called upon the young man.

"I want to see Valérie," I told him.

"There is no longer a Valérie," he replied roughly. "There is a Madame Fould, for you must know that I have married her."

In view of the accomplished fact my mission was at an end. I did see Madame Fould but I thought it best not to betray to her the reason of my visit.

A little time afterwards Gustave Fould somehow managed to get out of his difficulty, for he returned to France and patched up a reconciliation with his family.

Valérie gave him several charming children, but, as she herself had foretold at the spiritualistic séance at Jules Lecomte's, her happiness did not last.

Her husband, who had given proof of such passion for her, soon deserted her and formed a

liaison with an opera singer named Mademoiselle Wangel. Valérie was left alone with her children, and to support and educate them she bravely set to work to write stories.

One day when I was trying to find a furnished villa to rent for three months in the country near Paris, I went to look at a very pretty one beyond Asnières. Just then it was deserted by its owners, who were at the seaside. It was very luxuriously and elegantly furnished, and I especially noticed the good taste shown in the decoration of the nurseries.

I enquired to whom the house belonged, and was told to Madame Fould who lived in it with her children. My informant went on to say that the Roumanian Prince S., touched by the loveliness and the charm of the young mother, had given her his heart, and it was thanks to him that she lived in royal luxury.

Presently Gustave Fould was taken ill and the news was soon brought to his wife. She had never ceased to retain a certain tenderness for him who had once loved her so dearly, so she went to see him. Finding that he was not properly looked after, and feeling very sorry for him, she determined to constitute herself his nurse, for which purpose she actually had him taken to the Château at Asnières, though it belonged to Prince S. The latter was so full of

admiration for her action that he did nothing to prevent it ; quite the reverse in fact.

Gustave Fould died there, lovingly cared for to the end by his wife and children.

Valérie shed many bitter tears over her loss, and Prince S., more infatuated than ever, entreated her to become his wife. As soon as her time of mourning was over she married him.

She is now a Princess, as she herself had prophesied to us long ago when under the influence of hypnotism.

I make no commentary. I do not endeavour to convince sceptics, and I should find it very difficult to say what I myself think of spiritualism. But I was a personal witness of the facts I have related, and limit myself to their recital.

The year 1861 was marked by one of the most terrible crises ever experienced in the financial world.

A Jew named Mirès, the son of a humble watch-maker of Bordeaux, had become, thanks to his intelligence and the boldness of his enterprises, one of the most successful speculators of his day. He was the originator of gigantic railway schemes, and he controlled the Press by means of the newspapers founded by himself, and through the big subsidies he granted to those under other control. He had married his

daughter to Prince Polignac, the representative of one of the noblest families of France.

In 1860 an action was brought against him on account of certain operations of his, but for a long time the judicial authorities hesitated to take steps detrimental to him. In February 1861, however, the wealthy banker, then at the very zenith of his dazzling splendour, his lavish luxury making him the envy of all his contemporaries, was suddenly arrested one fine morning when surrounded by his clique of noble gentlemen, financiers and merchants, who were bowing and scraping before him, and thrown into Mazas prison.

Just at the very moment when this tremendous event was taking place one of my special friends came to see me, Benjamin Lunel, who was later to become the father-in-law of Porto-Riche the clever dramatic author.

Lunel told me he wished to speak to me in private, adding with a somewhat forced smile, "but I am not going to make you a declaration of love."

After I had taken him to a room where there was no danger of interruption, he said to me—

"Will you do me a great service, or rather, which comes to the same thing, will you come to the rescue of one of my dearest friends?"

"Of course I will. But what do you want me to do exactly?"

"To hide some one in your rooms for a short time where he cannot possibly be discovered."

"Good Gracious! I hope your friend is not a murderer! But you are his guarantee, and I cannot refuse you anything. I have got one or two secret places where he would be quite safe."

"A thousand thanks. Well, my friend is the banker Osiris. He's hand and glove with Mirès, who has just been arrested. He expects every moment to be taken up and put in prison himself, but liberty of action is absolutely necessary to him to enable him to weather the storm threatening him in his financial affairs, and he is especially alarmed at the effect his incarceration would have upon those who still retain confidence in him.

"We must save him! We must preserve him for the brilliant future his exceptional qualities will, I feel sure, secure for him. I can't offer him my own rooms, for the relations between us are too well known for him to be safe in them."

"Well," I enquired, "where is your Osiris? Bring the Egyptian god, who needs the help of a simple mortal, here as soon as possible."

A minute afterwards Lunel brought to me the man who was later to astonish the world with his fabulous wealth, his munificent humanitarian schemes, and the many artistic and scientific societies founded by him.

When I saw him for the first time his appear-

ance was piteous enough, for, in spite of himself, he could not help glancing behind him, as if to assure himself that he had not been followed.

I took him to a fairly large room which I called my Chinese cabinet because it was decorated with Oriental porcelain and bronzes. Such was the refuge I offered him, explaining to him that as the room was rarely used there was no fear of his being disturbed.

He thanked me with a fervour which showed how great was the service I was doing him. I had a bed put up for him and he stopped with me for a week, taking all his meals with me so as not to have to go out. I could fancy him holding imaginary grave and philosophic dialogues with the grotesque figures on the screens in his prison.

At the end of a week Lunel, who had often come to see his friend and report on the events that were taking place, told me that, as he did not wish to trespass longer on my generosity, he had found a new refuge for Osiris. I declared that I was willing for him to stop as long as it was necessary for him to hide, but for prudential reasons he thought it better to go elsewhere.

He now went to Madame Rémy, who lived in the Avenue de Boulogne, and was the mistress of the King of Holland. It was evident that she was not just then expecting her royal lover, who would not have been best pleased to find another man stopping with her.

A few more days passed by and then Lunel came to tell me that his friend, who had been assured that there was no further need for anxiety, had resumed his ordinary mode of life. Osiris, however, came to express his gratitude to me again, and as a memento of his stay with me he gave me a beautiful lace parasol.

After this episode I often asked him to my dinners, and I remember one evening when Vacquérie, manager of the *Evénement*, was also there, that Osiris told the latter that he had at one time earned his living on that paper.

" Were you Editor ? " enquired Vacquérie.

" Oh, no, I was only a hawker. For a long time I used to go backwards and forwards every day on the steamer running between Havre and Trouville to sell the *Évênement* to the passengers. But you see I do not blush for my humble beginnings."

Lunel gave me further particulars about the career of Osiris.

Before being employed in Mirès' bank the future Crœsus had been the assistant of a book-maker named Grob, and had frequented race-courses to take the stakes of the bettors.

In the will of the great philanthropist, two thousand francs were left to this Grob, and his sister, with whom Osiris had been in love, was put down for a legacy of three thousand francs. Modest bequests, it is true ; but for all that,

proof that the wealthy financier did not forget his old friends.

The first large sum invested by Osiris was the dowry of his wife, who was the daughter of his landlord, who gave the bridegroom the house for which he had previously paid rent. The property was situated in the Rue La Bruyère, and Osiris lived in it till his death; but, having become rich, he occupied more luxurious apartments than those in which he had lodged as a bachelor. As his fortune increased, he bought the houses adjoining his own, in the end acquiring a great part of the Rue La Bruyère.

With a view to being able to gaze at his ease at his houses, which no doubt symbolized for him the gradual growth of his fortune, he had a long glass gallery constructed, in which he often used to pace to and fro.

Knowing the man well, I can't help thinking that some little vanity was mixed up with his philanthropy, and that he liked people to talk of his generosity. But this ostentation in doing good, though morally, of course, inferior to pure disinterestedness, has decided advantages from a social point of view, and it is much to be desired that all millionaires should be animated by similar motives.

Mirès, with whom Osiris had at first linked his fate, never recovered from the blow dealt to his position by his imprisonment. I must add,

that the judgment pronounced against him in the first instance was quashed, then reaffirmed, and again quashed, finally ending in an acquittal. But in spite of the verdict of rehabilitation, Mirès was never again able to stem the current of distrust set in motion by his arrest. He was, in the end, submerged by it, whilst Osiris floated on the crest of the wave. Why was fate so cruel to one, so indulgent to the other? A puzzle that needs a new Œdipus for its solution.

When, a few years ago, I took part as a former member of the staff of the Théâtre Français at the inauguration of a statue of de Musset, that had been erected at the corner of the house of Molière, I once more saw Osiris, who had given the monument to the city of Paris.

He recognized me, and nodded to me. I wondered whether, in the midst of the adulation being lavished upon him, he remembered my Chinese cabinet. It is just possible that he did!

I can well understand the admiration felt for great financiers. They do, indeed, need a staunch heart to be able to launch themselves upon a career in which, for no apparent reason, they are just as likely to come to prison and to ruin as to the golden sands of Pactolus and the adoration of their fellow-men.

CHAPTER XXIII

I play in English at the Manchester Theatre—I astonish Baron James de Rothschild—How I was brought into relations with the famous Davenport Brothers—Victorien Sardou calls up the spirit of the daughter of the publisher Didier—Bernard Palissy draws the summer-house of Mozart in the Kingdom of Heaven—The success and decline of the Davenport Brothers—An immaterial spirit with the arm of a butcher.

Before he was appointed manager of the house of Molière, Edouard Thierry had constantly dwelt with enthusiasm on my gifts in his dramatic criticism in the *Moniteur*. When, therefore, he succeeded Empis, I hoped that he would often take occasion to justify the praise with which he had honoured me. He did nothing of the sort, but left me out of everything almost entirely.

It will readily be understood that I soon became tired of the compulsory repose I had to take. Having been told that managers of theatres in England made foreign actors and actresses very welcome, and that if I knew the English language, I could get a liberal engagement on the other side of the channel, I determined to learn that language, succeeding so well

that at the end of two years I really might have been taken for a fellow-countrywoman of Shakespeare.

When, I felt myself mistress of the English pronunciation, I put myself into communication with the manager of the Manchester Theatre, with whom I signed an agreement. I did not apply to a theatre in London because I thought the publicity of an appearance there would call Thierry's attention to my performances. I had taken this step unknown to him, merely asking him for three months' holiday on account of my health, and he granted it readily enough, though he would certainly have refused it if he had known that I meant to turn it to account by acting in England.

Just as I was starting, I had occasion to see old Baron James de Rothschild. He had often noticed me, because I was very like a daughter-in-law of his, to whom he was devotedly attached. He was an assiduous visitor at the Théâtre Français, as he was in love with a young *débutante* there, so we had many a chat together.

When he heard of my travelling schemes, he immediately wrote me a cheque for 10,000 francs on the London branch of the Rothschild Bank.

"Look here," he said, as he gave it to me,

"take this; you will want it, living is very dear over there."

Tom Taylor, then one of the first playwrights of England, the son-in-law of the famous novelist, Charles Dickens, had written a piece for me called *Heart and Hands*. I learnt it at a galloping rate, and the author, who had begged me to recite certain speeches in it to him, assured me that I had not the slightest French accent.

The foreign language was not the only difficulty with which I had to contend at the Manchester Theatre. What really disconcerted me most was, I think, the peculiar way in which the prompting was done.

The prompter, most indispensable of assistants, was not placed as in a French theatre, in a recess in the middle of the stage, but the work was done by two readers, posted one on each side in the wings, who aided the actors according to whether, as they moved to and fro on the boards, they were nearer or further on the left or the right.

I confess I found it very trying to accommodate myself to this arrangement. It has, since then, been given up in the theatres of Great Britain in favour of the plan adopted on the Continent. It was the French actor, Fechter, who, when he became manager of the Lyceum,

one of the chief theatres of London, brought about this little revolution.

I was most kindly and indulgently received by the English public. The Manchester Press overwhelmed me with compliments, and gave a banquet in my honour. And throughout the United Kingdom all the newspapers sang my praises.

Alas! my triumph was my perdition. In vain had I counted on the manager of the Comédie Française remaining in ignorance of my escapade. The voice of fame told him the truth, and he was greatly annoyed at discovering that I had made a fool of him by pretending to be ill, and also that an actress for whose talent he could find no employment at the Comédie Française, was received with thunderous applause directly she showed herself elsewhere.

He made up his mind never to give me another holiday, and he stuck to this grim resolve only too firmly in future.

When I got back I went to see Baron James de Rothschild, to give him back his cheque, which I had not used. He looked at me for a minute with an expression of intense astonishment, and then remarked—

"It is the very first time, my dear child, that I have ever had money given back to me;" and the old fellow added, with a sarcastic smile,

"Your action is really so extraordinary that I will accept the ten thousand francs, so that you may retain the honour of that action."

I told the pressmen of Manchester, who had shown such appreciation of me, that I should be only too glad if my position in Paris should enable me to be of service to any of them. To this some of them replied that they would be very grateful to me if I could do something to help two young Americans, in whom several of them were much interested.

The Americans in question were two spiritualists, named William and Ira Davenport. I promised to help them in their first *début* before the French public, and to keep my word to them I set to work as soon as I was settled at home again, with my *penates* about me, to translate a pamphlet giving an account of the wonders the Davenports were in the habit of achieving.

Therein it was stated that they got their miraculous gifts straight from Heaven. That the Creator exonerated them from obedience to the ordinary laws of the universe, and that they possessed the supernatural power of conversing with departed spirits, and subjecting them to their will.

In spite of the unfavourable impression this most objectionable mysticism made upon me,

I felt bound not to tamper in any way with the text that had been entrusted to me. When, however, my translation was completed, I was very exercised in my mind as to what editor would be likely to publish such a lucubration.

"Take it to Didier!" said my husband, when he noticed how worried I was.

"Why to Didier?" I asked.

"Because I know he puts faith in all that humbug. He recently lost a daughter, and Victorien Sardou, who it seems is an extraordinary medium, calls her up before his eyes nearly every evening, so that he may talk with her. I think they are both equally mad on the subject."

I therefore went to Didier. I told him what I had come about, and he read my manuscript then and there. He had not got through many pages before he expressed his delight, all that seemed obscure to me being as clear to him as the water of a spring.

I mentioned Sardou to him.

"What a man!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," I replied. "He has marvellous dramatic talent."

"Pooh! perhaps he has; but that is not his chief merit. Who can't write a good play? His real superiority consists in his power of talking with spirits, as I am talking to you. He

calls them, and they hasten to appear in obedience to his will. Just wait a minute, and I will show you something infinitely superior to the *Pattes de Mouche*."

With that, he went and fetched a big sheet of paper, on which was a pen and ink drawing. It represented a summer-house with a portico, balcony, etc., set in a garden full of shady trees.

Looking at it more closely, I saw that all the lines of the architecture, the branches and foliage of the trees, were indicated by musical notes, quavers and semi-quavers, arpeggios, naturals, sharps and flats—each window was a sonata, each tree a song.

For a minute or two I gazed spell-bound at this queer, but at the same time fascinating production.

"Who do you suppose drew that?" Didier asked me triumphantly, "Victorien Sardou, or rather his hand, for it was guided by a spirit. The real author has signed it in the corner."

I looked, and read "Bernard Palissy!"

"Yes, Bernard Palissy! Sardou called up the spirit of that great ceramic artist at my house one evening, and this is the outcome of their collaboration. The medium only had to let his pen run about the paper, the spirit guided his hand. Remember, Sardou doesn't know a note of music. Yet there are complete passages there that could be played by a musician."

"When it was all finished," he went on, "Sardou asked Bernard Palissy what he had intended to represent, and he replied, 'Mozart's Summer-house in the Kingdom of Heaven.' What do you think of that?"

I remembered what my husband had said of the worthy editor and Sardou, but I took pretty good care not to disillusion the former, and he continued—

"Sardou often calls up spirits in my house. The first who responded to his summons were very violent. They always are when they appear for the first time in a house with which they are not familiar. They broke my looking-glasses, clocks and crockery. There was a regular smash-up. But they feel more at home now, and I live on very good terms with them."

He then returned to the subject of my two American spiritualists and promised to publish my translation of their pamphlet immediately. So all was going on for the best.

The Davenports arrived in Paris. The pamphlet setting forth their glory was issued by Didier, and, contrary to all expectations, they had an immense success. There are always lots of credulous folk as eager to listen to incredible stories as children in the nursery.

My husband and I engaged the Davenports to hold their first séances at our house. The

audience of authors, artists and society notables whom we had invited to be present were astonished, and spread the news of their enthusiastic delight everywhere.

Here is a description of the feats performed by the Davenports. They appeared before the public in the first instance seated on two benches in a huge cupboard, and one of the spectators was asked to come and bind them on to their seats. This was most carefully and conscientiously done. Arms, wrists, legs and ankles were securely tied, after which the doors of the cupboard were closed, to be opened again the very next minute. There sat the Davenports freed from their bonds, which lay upon the boards at their feet.

Musical instruments, a violin and a mandoline, were then hung up at the back of the cupboard, the Davenports were once more bound hand and foot and the doors closed upon them, at which the instruments at once began to play. The doors were re-opened. There hung the instruments, and there, still bound to their benches, sat the spiritualists.

Once more the cupboard was shut and all the lights in the room were put out. All of a sudden the violin and mandoline, bathed in a kind of phosphorescent glow rendering them visible, issued from the cupboard vibrating loudly to

the touch of almost invisible hands and circling in space above the heads of the spectators. The lights were turned on again and the doors of the cupboard opened, revealing the Davenports still bound to their benches and the instruments hanging on their nails.

The pamphlet explained that all these phenomena were produced by spirits under the orders of the two Americans.

The séances held in my house created an immense sensation, their fame spreading far and wide, so the Davenports announced that they would give a performance in a public building.

So great was the reputation they won that a good many well-known writers thought it necessary to protest in the name of positivism, against the infatuation exercised by their mystic proceedings. Even Edmond About made haste to sharpen his best pen with which to burst the bubble of the American spiritualists. He argued very ably and seriously against belief in the marvellous, and declared that the Davenports could not perform miracles because such things as miracles were impossible. This campaign against them in the Press did my two wonder-workers a good deal of harm.

There was a great row at the first public séance they gave, which took place in the Herz Salle. A certain man named Pouchet got up,

and, shouting that the cupboard was a fraud, rushed to it and gave one of the benches such a tremendous blow with his fist that he broke it. At that the spectators suddenly became furious without any apparent reason and clamoured to have their money back, and, in the stampede that ensued, a good deal more was snatched from the door-keeper than he had received.

The Davenports were not at all discouraged by all this, and their later séances went off more quietly, but they never again achieved such success as they had done at my house.

I remember one incident of a public séance that amused me greatly.

One of the Davenports was absent. He was in love with the famous horsewoman known as Menken, with whom Dumas the elder was also smitten, and he was probably with her on this occasion. Anyhow, his place was taken by Fay, the cashier of the spiritualists, who was, I believe, quite as clever as either of them.

He was a big, strong, muscular fellow, and when the violin began to perform its evolutions in the semi-obscurity I saw that it was held up by a huge arm. It was all I could do to prevent myself from laughing, and at the end of the performance, when I happened to be alone with Fay for a minute, I said, touching his arm—

"It's rather difficult to believe that this belongs to an immaterial spirit!"

He shrugged his shoulders and replied—

"The public doesn't look at things very closely."

In fact the Davenports, as you will have guessed, were nothing more than expert conjurers.

They used to puff and swell themselves out when they were being bound, and then, contracting their muscles again, slip through their bonds like eels, and they were also able to resume these bonds again almost instantaneously, reappearing with legs and arms apparently tightly tied as before.

One of them used to hold up the violin, bathed in phosphorus, above the heads of the spectators and slip about amongst them barefooted, waving it about as he ran. All that was really needed was tremendous agility, but there was nothing miraculous about that, as their big cashier, Fay, was quite able, on occasion, to take the place of either of the Davenports.

When I think it all over now, I can only congratulate the French for showing themselves less credulous than the American and English public in face of pretended miracles in which there was nothing very wonderful after all.

CHAPTER XXIV

My quarrel with Edouard Thierry, manager of the Comédie Française—A stormy interview with the private secretary of Monsieur Fould—A soldier as Minister of Public Instruction—An old warrior who trembles before actors—My tour with Bressant—A Belgian workman washes his hands in honour of me—The life and death of a Don Juan.

My success in England had made me perfectly odious to the manager of the house of Molière, and when his prejudice against me became too glaringly evident, I went to him and asked him to explain why he disliked me so much.

"I like you as well as any other member of the staff," was his reply.

"Well then," I said, "let me act. I want to take the part of Phædra. Will you give it to me?"

"No."

"Why not, are you afraid I shall make a success of it?"

"No!" was the curt reply.

"Well, if I fail you will have the satisfaction of triumphing over me, so that it is quite to your interest to lay a trap for me by saying yes."

"The part is beyond your powers. It is out

of humanity that I refuse to let you undertake it, for I know you are consumptive."

"Come, Mr. Manager," I retorted, "where's the humanity of flinging such an argument as that at my head. You are more of a royalist than the king. I would gladly sacrifice my health to my art."

"It's no use talking. You will not change my decision!"

It is pretty certain that if I was, as he pretended to believe, attacked by phthisis, the disease was of a mild form, seeing that I am still alive.

I thought I would make an attempt in another direction. I felt very sure that the hostility shown to me by M. de S., private secretary of M. Fould, Minister of Finance, had a good deal to do with the difficulties with which I had to contend at the Comédie Française. This M. de S. was then all powerful, and it was generally taken for granted that he was a natural son of M. Fould, whom he resembled in a most striking manner.

I remember Neuwerkerque, director of the Beaux-Arts, saying to me one day, "I have just put my foot in it and no mistake!"

"What, you!" I exclaimed. "A Parisian like you! It's difficult to believe that!"

"Well listen, then. I went a few minutes ago

to the Ministry of State to enquire after Fould, who is suffering from an attack of rheumatism, and there I saw his private secretary, who is as like him as two drops of water are to each other, and I innocently asked the young fellow if his father were better.

"'My father has not been ill,' was the reply.

"'I thought he had rheumatism?'

"'My father has not had rheumatism.'

"'Well then, how is M. Fould?'

"'Monsieur Fould is not my father.'

"'Oh, I beg your pardon!'

"'There's no harm done.'

"I promptly made myself scarce, and when I told some friends of what I had done, without mentioning the secretary by name, they said—

"'Oh, it must have been M. de S. you saw. There are very good reasons why he should resemble M. Fould.'"

I went, therefore, to this M. de S., whose secret relationship to M. Fould gave him so much influence.

"What have I done," I asked him, "that you should pursue me with so much animosity?"

"I'll tell you at once," was his reply, as he looked me full in the face. "You caused the death of a very dear friend of mine, young V. He killed himself because you showed yourself so cruelly indifferent to him."

I knew that story and it may have been true. But what could I do? Was I responsible for the young fellow's madness?

I replied bitterly to M. de S. "Are the actresses of the Théâtre Français then expected to accept the addresses of all your friends? I should like to know whether the Comédie Française is a place of amusement for politicians and young men of good family, or a temple of dramatic art."

He was simply furious, and clenched his hands as they rested on the table. I went on without taking any notice of his anger.

"Every time I appear on the stage I receive ten or fifteen declarations of love. Am I expected to respond to them all. Is that one of the conditions of membership of the staff?"

He rose as if to dismiss me, and, as I had nothing more to say to him, I took my leave.

The death of his friend was not really the only reason for his prejudice against me.

There was a very inferior actress at the Français who had once been his mistress, and although she had long since been married she was still under his protection. It was to her that certain of the parts of which I had been deprived had been given.

I saw that there was no way out of the difficult position in which I found myself, so I went

to see Marshal Vaillant, then Minister of Fine Arts. Under an autocratic government the sword ruled everything, which is how it came about that it was part of a soldier's duties to listen to the grievances of actresses.

I explained to him that I had come to resign my post at the Comédie Française.

"Resign!" he cried. "I won't accept your resignation. I have often applauded you. I have a great admiration for your talent. I will not have you leave the Théâtre Français. Good gracious me! What do you complain of?"

"I no longer have any parts given to me."

"What nonsense is this? By Jove! I must get to the bottom of it all. You acted Sylvia, didn't you? in *Le Jeu de l'Amour et du Hasard*."

"Yes, Marshal, I did."

"Well, I shall order Thierry to put that play in to-morrow's programme. We shall see what he does. Hang it all!"

The experiment was conclusive. Thierry gave the part of Sylvia to another actress.

The Marshal was furious. He sent for Thierry, who declared that the other artists refused to act with me. He had, no doubt, put them up to this so as to have a reason to give for leaving me out.

Marshal Vaillant told me of the answer he had received, and I said to him—

"If in an army under your orders there were some officers who refused to fight because they did not like one of their comrades, what would you do?"

"Confound it all!" he cried. "I would make them obey."

"Well, Marshal?"

"Ah," he exclaimed in comic despair. "If only soldiers, not actors, were in question; but those wretched lascars beat me altogether. It is I who am compelled to obey them. But have patience a little longer. Perhaps a change will take place presently in the attitude towards you of your fellow-actors."

I resolved to follow his advice. Unfortunately, the coldness of the artists of the Comédie Française towards me was anything but imaginary.

A few weeks after, that is to say, in February 1863, the great actor Geoffroy retired from the stage and I was left out of the invitations to the farewell banquet in his honour. This omission mortified me more than I can express, for I was perfectly certain that I had done nothing whatever to justify it.

My husband talked of demanding an explanation from the staff of the Théâtre Français of the insult which had been offered me, and my fear of his getting into a difficulty on my

account made me determine to withdraw finally from the Comédie Française, so I sent in my resignation, which was this time accepted.

Instead of giving me a benefit when I left, the management allotted me the sum of six thousand francs. This was a very great deal less than I had a right to expect, for the receipts at performances for the benefit of artists leaving the Comédie Française often brought in some sixty thousand francs ; but I felt I owed it to my dignity to make no protest.

It was not until long years afterwards that I found out what it was that I was charged with.

The immense number of my acquaintances and the independence of my character, which led to my not restricting myself to the narrow limits of theatrical society and to my making friends in more intellectual circles, had made my comrades of the stage suspect me of being a spy. They really believed in good faith that I made reports about them to the Imperial Police. As if Napoleon III cared in the least for the political opinions of the actors of the Théâtre Français !

Oh, the vanity of dramatic artists !

This explanation, as I have said, was not given to me until long afterwards. My informant was Madeleine Brohan, who made me laugh when she told me about it, and I had no difficulty in

proving to her how childish were the accusations of which I had been the victim.

However that may have been, I did not trouble myself at the time to probe the motives of the disfavour in which I was held at the Comédie Française. "They don't want to have anything more to do with me nor I with them," I said to myself. "I can get on very well alone."

I thought I would go for an important theatrical tour in the provinces, and I entered into an agreement with Bressant, the incomparable interpreter of the aristocracy. We played first at Brussels, and then went to the south of France, where we made Marseilles and Nice our chief headquarters.

At Brussels I had one of the most delightful compliments paid me that I ever received in the whole of my dramatic career.

Charlotte Corday was about to be acted, and I was giving my instructions to those who were to take part in it. One of them, a young workman, was to arrest me after I had assassinated Marat.

"Must I seize you?" he asked me.

"Of course you must."

"With both hands?"

"Why yes; you mustn't even be afraid of shaking me, as if you were really indignant at the murder I had committed."

"Ah," he remarked, looking first at me and then at his hands, which were particularly rough and black. "If I have to do that, Madame, I will wash my hands with soap first."

You can imagine how this resolve made me laugh.

As I am by way of quoting impressive remarks called forth by our art, which, whilst they amuse, also sometimes flatter us as much as the verdict expressed by recognized judges, I will tell of an exclamation shouted at me in the Marseilles theatre.

I was playing Clarissa Harlowe with Bressant as Lovelace, and when the latter uses insulting words to his victim, who stands mute and resigned before him, a spectator in the gallery was so carried away by his ardent sympathy with her that he called out to me—

"Spit in his face, little one!"

Bressant was very well fitted to take the part of Lovelace, for he was a regular lady-killer and could boast of many conquests. He was extremely distinguished-looking, thin and slight and graceful, with a very animated manner and an expression of face alike tender and intellectual.

He was, I believe, a regular Don Juan. When he was at the Variétés he married the daughter of the leader of the *claqueurs*, but when she was

about to become a mother he suddenly deserted her and went off to Russia. His wife, who had given birth to a little girl, to whom she gave the name of Alice, soon after her husband left her, was unable to support herself and her child by her own exertions, so she accepted the protection of a certain Captain Rosetti, who was a very worthy fellow, and had been one of the heroes of Reichshoffen.

The little Alice, when she grew up, became an actress, and got work at the Vaudeville where she played in several parts, but she had no success, for though she really was rather pretty, she did not appear to be so on the stage, which had the effect of making her look quite ugly. There are certain actresses who suffer from this strange peculiarity, which is, however, rare, for it is generally just the other way round.

Alice attracted the notice of the wealthy B., who was looked upon as a philanthropist, and amongst other pieces of generosity had given a fine observatory to the town of N. The only favour he conferred on Madame Bressant, however, was to make her the mother of two children, after which he abandoned her. Beware of philanthropists, whose outward splendour often conceals a private life worthy of anything but admiration!

Fortunately for Alice she made a conquest of a Russian, no less rich than the philanthropist, who first saw her at a grand reception, where she was one of the hired musicians, and performed on the piano. Her new adorer married her and adopted her children. In theatrical careers these sudden changes of fortune often take place, resembling those which dramatic authors introduce in their plays, as if fate were inspired by scenes on the stage.

When Bressant came back to France he concerned himself not at all as to the fate of his wife, of whose *liaison* with Rosetti he had heard. She died soon afterwards, and the widower married the charming Mademoiselle de Lucenay, whom he simply adored ; but he was not one to remain in the same bonds for long at a time, and presently he began to pay court to the fascinating Madeleine Brohan, who in her turn was presently succeeded by the equally taking Mademoiselle C., of the Comédie Française, whose heart he won, although he was now growing old—the mere fame of his earlier conquests leading him on, it would seem, to fresh victories.

Unfortunately the fair Mademoiselle C. soon began to contrast her own spring-tide with the autumn of her lover, and in the end decided that she really deserved something better, so

though he was still head over heels in love with her she left him to get married to some one else.

He was so terribly cut up that his health gave way, and he took to his bed. His wife, who, strange to say, still retained her affection for him, nursed him devotedly, carrying her self-denial to a height of sublimity, for Madeleine Brohan, who was equally unable to forget Bressant, entreated her to allow her to share the task of caring for the suffering Don Juan.

Madame Bressant sympathized with the loving anguish of her rival, and the two women took it in turns to watch beside the pillow of the invalid, sometimes even sharing the vigil. Truly touching was the sight of rivals reconciled in a common work of pity.

Bressant died, and thus did the youthful Mlle. C. involuntarily avenge the many victims of that most fickle of lovers.

The familiar words of the Gospel might well be modified in this connection—

"He who causes others to suffer through love, shall himself perish by love."

CHAPTER XXV

The grief of an old countrywoman of Champagne—The Amusing Story of an Innkeeper of Étampes—How I invited my friends to make a meal of Tancred—I act in a burlesque of *Hamlet*—How I had to powder the face of Joncières—I appear as Hamlet at the Gaieté—An opinion expressed by Madame Sarah Bernhardt.

My tour with Bressant was very successful, and the next year I made another on which he did not accompany me.

I have some touching and quaint memories of the latter, as well as of the former. At Troyes I acted Adrienne Lecouvreur, and the tragic death of the heroine I impersonated caused many handkerchiefs to be wetted.

One night, after the play was over, some of the spectators on their way home saw an old woman in the Place du Théâtre, weeping bitterly and remaining obstinately standing in the Place as the streams of people circulated about her. Presently some one said: "Whatever is the matter, mother?"

"Oh! oh! oh!" was the sobbing reply. "I have just seen that poor girl die over there. Oh, oh, oh, what a pity it was! oh, my God,

what a pity! She was such a darling, poor girl. Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Is that all? But she isn't really dead. At this very moment she is just as well as you or I."

"No, no; I know she's dead!" repeated the poor old soul. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

Finding it impossible to reassure her on my account, those who had stopped to ask what was the matter led the old woman to the actors' door of exit, from which they knew I should issue directly. When she saw me appear, she cried: "Oh, Lord Jesus! It is really true. Oh, how miserable I was! Well, well, little lady, I am glad enough to see you alive again."

We gave two or three representations at Étampes. During our stay in that little town the keeper of the hotel in which we put up discharged his duties as host and caterer with a conscientious enthusiasm which agreeably surprised us.

Most innkeepers of France are, it must in justice to them be added, attentive and obliging, but this one excelled all his fellow-hosts in his courtesy and readiness to serve us.

On the eve of our departure he stopped me in the courtyard of his hotel, and politely taking off his white cook's cap, said to me—

"I have seen you at the theatre, madame, and you are indeed a great artist."

"You flatter me, monsieur, by your admiration," I replied.

"I know what's what, I can tell you!" he went on. And I rejoined—

"I have not the slightest doubt about it."

"You fancy, perhaps, that my kitchen, my stoves, my saucepans, my roast joints, and my ragouts absorb all my thoughts and energies, but let me tell you that the cook cannot stifle in me the lover of the ideal! I worship the theatre. I am quite mad about it. Every moment of leisure—and leisure, alas! is all too rare with me—I devote to reading our great writers. I read tragedies, comedies, dramas, Corneille, Racine, Molière, Voltaire, Victor Hugo, Dumas. I know many parts by heart. I declaim them as I roast my chickens and toss my omelettes, thus redeeming my profession from vulgarity and ennobling my position."

"This is really wonderful," I remarked, "and I heartily congratulate you."

Encouraged by this compliment, he suddenly said, with an air of mystery—

"You just wait a bit and you will hear something." Then putting his round cap on again, he drew back four or five paces, and ignoring the white apron covering his portly

figure, he began pacing solemnly up and down, declaiming in a loud voice the outpourings of Voltaire's Tancred—

"Oh, all ye noble hearts who hold their country dear!
With what unfeigned delight this place again I near."

Then, turning to imaginary attendants, he went on—

"Let my plain shield (holding up the corner of his apron),
my helmet unadorned (grandly removing his cap),
Hang mournfully upon these sombre walls,
Fit emblems of my sorrow and despair."

"Bravo!" I cried; but it was all I could do to keep from laughing, so very comic did this head cook appear, holding forth in the courtyard of an inn as if he were some knight-errant of old.

The whole population of the hotel had collected at the windows; scullions, and pastry-cooks armed with their spits and dripping-pans had appeared at the doors leading to the kitchen, to listen to their master, an ancient charwoman clung to the bars of a grating with both hands, and a little chambermaid paused in shaking a carpet from an attic window, most of their faces expressing naïve admiration.

The innkeeper continued—

"Proud Orbassan. It is thee whom I defy. (Here he pointed at the poor old charwoman, who quickly disappeared.)
Take, then, my life, or at my bidding die!"

He paused. I renewed my applause. The inn radiated forth joyful enthusiasm from the ground floor to the roof.

The triumphant reciter, cap in hand, bowed first to me, then right and left to the rest of the audience. Then wiping his heated brow with the back of his sleeve, he asked me—

"What do you think of my rendering of that heroic *rôle?*"

"Perfect," was my reply.

"Yes, isn't it?" he frankly retorted. Then, taking me into a corner of the courtyard, he said almost in a whisper—

"Forgive me, Madame, if I venture to confide to you an ambition I have long cherished. I long, if only for once, to act in a real theatre. Tell me, Madame, that this dream is not altogether unrealizable. Oh, do say that you will let me act in *Tancred* with you."

It was very evident that his delusion was more serious than I had thought, and not to dash his mad hopes to the ground too cruelly, I made answer—

"Certainly, if ever I take it into my head to act *Tancred*, I will with pleasure assign to you the part of which you are so worthy."

He was in the seventh heaven of delight.

"Oh, Madame!" he exclaimed. "How I thank you. Henceforth that hope will keep

up my courage in the tedious monotony of my profession. Thank you. Thank you, a thousand times."

The next day I asked him for his bill for entertaining my little company. He refused to give it to me. However, I succeeded in making him accept payment, but when we were just starting I could not prevent him from adding to my luggage a hamper of provisions he had cooked on purpose for me.

When I got back to Paris at the end of my tour, that is to say, about a month later, I had forgotten all about the worthy innkeeper, but I was presently reminded of him by receiving a large package, on the label of which I read—

"From Tancred."

The parcel contained a big turkey already trussed for putting in the oven.

What was I to do? Tell the sender that I should never return to Étampes? That would have simply broken his heart. I invited some friends to come and help me eat the turkey, and told them of the adventure connected with it. It delighted them greatly.

The next month came another parcel, this time containing a fine pheasant. A second invitation was issued to my friends. Fresh exclamations in praise of Tancred rose up around my table.

For more than a year such gifts arrived

regularly every month. I was rather embarrassed by them, but did not know how to set about checking the generosity of my innkeeper. When my friends assembled to do justice to the supplies from Étampes, they used to say, laughing happily—

"Now to eat Tancred!"

Sometimes, too, when they met me elsewhere, they used to enquire: "What news of Tancred? When shall we come and devour him?"

Poor Tancred! When I think of his guileless folly, I cannot help feeling sorry for his bitter disappointment when he loses the hope by which he has been buoyed up so long.

It was at Lyons, on the tour about which I have been talking, that I for the first time took the *rôle* of the Prince of Denmark, in a burlesque of *Hamlet*. I was fortunate enough to win considerable applause from the spectators.

A few months later I played in the same piece with equal success at Nantes, and it was there that Joncières, who had begun life as a painter and hitherto had obtained no recognition as a composer, begged me to bring in, in the course of my representations, some music he had written on the theme of *Hamlet*.

He came to my dressing-room for a minute before his first appearance as a conductor, and his excitement had made him as red in the face as a boiled crab. Never before had he held the

baton of the leader of an orchestra, and this was the first musical composition he had ever submitted to the judgment of the public.

"Why, my dear friend," I said to him, "your face is positively on fire. You really can't make your appearance with such a crimson countenance. Your anxiety is all too evident. Wait a moment whilst I make you presentable."

With that I powdered his face well with my own puff.

The fame of my various appearances as the Prince of Denmark led Dumaine, who was then manager of the Gaieté, to present *Hamlet* at his theatre. During the representations Meurice, one of the translators of the play, came to hear me, and wishing to express his satisfaction to me, he told me that my sex really helped me to express the melancholy and indecision of the character in question. Henceforth he always called me his Hamlet No. 2, Rouvière having been his No. 1, and Mounet-Sully his No. 3.

A little time afterwards I met Madame Sarah Bernhardt, who declared that it was quite impossible for a woman to act Hamlet.

This, I expect, is why she interpreted him herself several years later, and I have great pleasure in admitting that she made a simply adorable Prince!

CHAPTER XXVI

Gambetta proves his great friendship for me—A little-known episode of the National Defence in 1870—A relic of Gambetta—An entertainment is given on my behalf at the Trocadero—Jeanne Samary's remark about the value of looking like a cocotte—A retrospect of my career.

Since 1870 my life has been saddened by many terrible trials. I lost three of my children in rapid succession. One of them had been ill a long time, and there had been talk of sending him to Egypt, in the hope that the warm climate and dry air would do him good. Gambetta, to whom I had been introduced by Vacquerie, voluntarily offered to get a free passage to Alexandria for me and the boy, but the doctors decided that it would be no use for us to go.

Some little time before this Gambetta had offered to use all his influence to get me reinstated in the Comédie Française, but I was too proud for that, and refused to allow him to do so.

The devoted friendship shown for me by the great statesman, and the affection retained for me until their deaths by such high-minded republicans as Vacquerie and Meurice, were

enough conclusively to refute the absurd accusation that I was a spy in the pay of the Imperial police.

My relations with Gambetta led to my becoming attached to his mistress, Madame de M. She had joined him at Tours during the war of 1870, and she told me that one day, when she was in the famous dictator's room, it was announced that the delegates of the Government had come to take counsel with him.

It was absolutely impossible for her to leave the room without being seen, and for the sake of her own reputation, and also for that of her lover, it was of the greatest importance that her presence should not be known. She was in bed, and she pulled the eider-down quilt over her in such a manner as completely to hide herself.

In came Crémieux, Glais-Bizoin and Admiral Fourichon, who talked with Gambetta for a long time, coming to very serious resolutions involving the honour of the sorely-tried country. Meanwhile Madame de M. was nearly smothered under her quilt, but she remained absolutely motionless, rising to the magnitude of the occasion. Once Glais-Bizoin, who was walking up and down, leant against the bed and seemed about to sit upon it, causing its inmate a moment of awful suspense; but Gambetta, who had his eye on the delegate, approached him, and, as if

unconsciously, managed to push him away in another direction. After this the statesman took care to remain by the bed, so as to prevent any one else approaching it until the interview was over.

Thus once more was the truth illustrated, that there is often a touch of the burlesque even in the most solemn episodes of human life.

Shakespeare was right to weld together, as he did, the comic and the tragic, and Victor Hugo's claim that their fusion is the very essence of all true art was indeed well founded.

Madame de M. simply worshipped Gambetta. I remember going to see her after the death of the great man, and noticing in a place of honour in her boudoir a huge, ugly old pipe under glass in a gorgeous frame. It had been Gambetta's pipe. What a touching tribute to love !

Some of my friends, having heard of the difficulties that had resulted from the heavy expenses to which I had been put through the illness of my poor child, conceived the generous idea of organizing a theatrical entertainment at the Trocadero on my behalf.

It was a brilliant success, and quite relieved me from the temporary embarrassment in which I had found myself. Sarah Bernhardt, Got and

Madeleine Brohan were amongst those who willingly exercised their great gifts on my behalf on this occasion.

I was not only an actress ; I was also a teacher, and I must say a few words here about the best pupil I ever had, the altogether charming Jeanne Samary. She used to attend Bressant's class at the Conservatoire, but her instructor having fallen ill some little time before the competitive examination, she came to ask me to give her some lessons, which I gladly consented to do.

The first time I saw her she had rouge enough on her face for three cocottes, and I said to her when she began to feel a little at home with me, " My dear Jeanne, why do you paint so outrageously ? You have no need for that with your rosy young cheeks."

" I know what I am about," was the reply. " To succeed now-a-days you must look like a cocotte, and I am absolutely determined to succeed."

She had a really extraordinarily good intonation, but for some time her action was clumsy and wanting in grace. I often took her to task about this without getting her to improve to any real extent. She understood all I said well enough, and tried hard, but without success, to imitate my gestures.

A Happy Inspiration

Suddenly, however, I had an inspiration. I took Jeanne Samary into my dressing-room, planted her opposite the full-length glass in my wardrobe, and said, "Now, my child, say your part."

She obeyed, exclaiming after a few minutes, "Good gracious! how ridiculous I look; what a duffer I am"; but she went on repeating her *rôle* without taking her eyes off her own reflection, and it was she herself in the end who corrected all her mistakes.

When a teacher has an intelligent pupil this is really the best lesson that can possibly be given to him or her.

When Jeanne was going to be married she came to tell me all about it.

I asked her if she liked her *fiance*.

"Good Heavens!" she replied, with the quaint *naïveté* peculiar to her; "I really don't know."

"But why are you going to marry him then?"

"Oh, that's simple enough," she said; "all the others offered me jewels, fine clothes, horses, carriages, a big house, but he was the only one who said anything about marriage to me, so I accepted him."

Now that I am very old I still watch from a distance all that goes on in the dramatic world.

It is quite impossible to take an impartial view when one is actually in it oneself. The stage exercises, on all who give themselves up to it, a strange and persistent fascination. Is it not said—to quote but one case in point—that poor Croizette fell into a decline and perhaps even died of grief at having left it?

Now and then I go back to the old house of Molière, where, in spite of everything, I passed many happy years and enjoyed my greatest artistic triumphs. There I see young *sociétaires*, who smile at me as if I were their grandmother. I go to give a greeting to the present manager, the courteous Monsieur Claretie, who seems to me to manage the affairs of the Comédie Française with infinitely more tact and good taste than any of his predecessors, such as Lockroy, Empis and Thierry.

"Ah," I say to him sometimes, "if only you had been my manager!"

These visits bring me the pleasure of calling up old memories, the only joy that now remains to me.

Here I am at the end of my memoirs. I hope they have amused the reader.

It is very certain that I have been able, thanks to my long life, to study many people and to witness many events, for if I was an actress I was also a spectator.

A Melancholy Retrospect

The stage is by no means the worst post of observation. The footlights attract like butterflies every variety of people, reigning sovereigns, ministers, great speculators, artists, etc., and the actor who would read the history of his own time has but to amuse himself by watching the fluttering crowd.

After all, what is existence?

> "Life's comedy is written on many a page,
> The universe itself supplies the stage."

It does not do to look upon it in any other way. It is just a comedy and nothing else, and by so regarding it is attained the detachment, the happy serenity which philosophers of every time have considered the greatest wisdom.

When I mentally review my career it seems to me sometimes that, instead of having been brought up and having spent my whole life on the stage, I had been looking on all the time from the dress-circle.

I have seen pass before me ambitious men, who at one time had scarcely so much as a bed to lie on, who were ere long to become one an emperor, another a minister, only not so very long afterwards to be flung from their pedestals.

I have seen shabby young fellows, with their feet in old shoes full of holes, rise to be successful speculators, reeking of gold and strutting

about in pillared palaces, and then a little later I have seen them in prison.

I have seen pretty young girls cleaning vegetables, to meet them again as queens of art, elegant society and luxury.

I have seen genius drowning itself in absinthe. I have seen great philanthropists deserting the brave mothers of their children. I have seen courtesans with most tender hearts, who died for want of some one to love them truly, and others who became very great ladies. I have also seen great ladies who have become courtesans.

I have applauded those who seemed to me to merit their success in life, and I have hissed the others.

Now I begin to feel a little weary, and one of these days I shall get up from my seat in the dress-circle and go away.

I shall leave the great playhouse and go to rejoin elsewhere the dear children I so loved to see about me, but who, alas ! left the theatre before me.

But the comedy of life will go on, for never can it be said

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